



THE LARK BUNTING

QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 61 | ISSUE 1 | JANUARY 2025

DFOBIRDS.ORG

“SKY ISLANDS” THREEPEAT

Last call to snag spot on
big SE Ariz trip in May

PAGE 23

DFO @ 90

Club marks milestone in
2025 with new 4-part history

PART 1, PAGE 14

FROM THE FIELD

2024 yet another great
year on DFO birding trail

PAGE 24

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

“Fence birds” in the
lens of John Breitsch

PAGE 38



Ferruginous Hawk
Dave Prentice
Pawnee National Grasslands
Weld County



A DFO member since 2018, **Dave Prentice** has been a birder / photographer for more than 10 years. A Colorado native, he lives in Denver and is retired from the industrial design field

ON THE COVER

Ferruginous Hawk: Jaw-dropping raptor with yellow-gaped grin

Patrick O'Driscoll

After a spring-to-autumn diet of Red-tailed Hawk as the large buteo across most of Colorado, winter's arrival quickens the heartbeat for birders looking for big-hawk variety as cold weather sets in.

They don't get bigger here than the Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*), the largest North American buteo in our raptor array. The ones that overwinter along Colorado's Front Range are likely to set up "sit-and-wait" hunting perches wherever there's a prairie dog town. (West of the Divide they also dine on jackrabbits and ground squirrels.) I usually see them in Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR and next door in Denver's First Creek @ DEN Open Space. Where's your favorite spot to spot a Ferruge?

The lens of DFO member-photographer **Dave Prentice** captured the one on our cover during a "Birds Plus+ Bird Photography" field trip he co-led early last December in the "raptor alley" areas near Pawnee National Grasslands in northeastern Colorado. It's one of the best views I've ever seen of those distinctive feather pantaloons that cover the legs (technically, "feathered tarsi"). See how they glow in the species' namesake rusty orange hue (from the Latin *ferrugineus*, "iron-rust color").

Of course, when trying to ID a Ferruginous Hawk through our binoculars, we all look for that signature slash of yellow, running from beak all the way back to below the eye. They call it the gape, but whenever I see it, I can't help anthropomorphizing in my mind to "yellow lipstick." Whatever you call it, that mouthline is distinctive.

Fun fact: The ones in our prairie dog towns often congregate in small groups that may grow to include eagles and others drawn to the spectacle of Ferruginous Hawks hopping and flapping as they bicker over prey. Another fun fact: They're so large that back when massive bison herds blanketed the Plains, Ferruginous built their prairieland nests with the bones and hair of the shaggy beasts.

Hardly regal behavior, but that word IS part of the species' scientific name (*Buteo regalis*, Latin for "regal, kingly"). It was assigned in the mid-1800s by **George R. Gray**, a British museum "birdkeeper." Nearly a century later, noted American ornithologist **Arthur Cleveland Bent** gushed in his 1930s description of the Ferruginous as a "splendid hawk, the largest, most powerful, and grandest of our buteos, a truly regal bird."

Given their nesting preference for open grassland and sagebrush-steppe country with rocky cliffs, some trees and human handiworks (oil and gas rigs, utility towers and farm structures), it's mildly surprising that more Ferruginous Hawks don't nest in Colorado — 71 total nests by one US Forest Service count. Perhaps that reflects our state's listing of Ferruginous as a "species of greatest conservation need."

The Cornell Lab's *Birds of the World* says Ferruginous Hawk populations have been in decline recently in some of the species' range. The worst drops have been in Canada, where the government has listed the species as threatened since 2010. Declines in the US noted in breeding-bird and migration surveys are blamed on "continued loss and fragmentation" of grass and shrub ecosystems to the usual land management suspects: invasive plants, energy development and agriculture.

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of *The Lark Bunting* since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he joined DFO in 2014, became a field trip leader in 2016, and leads occasional trips in Denver City Park and other local destinations,



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
Ferruginous Hawk: Jaw-dropping raptor with yellow-gaped grin
- 5 From the President**
Happy 90th birthday, DFO!
And so we begin a year-long celebration of us
- 9 DFO News Notes**
- 11 Winter Program Previews**
- 14 DFO @ 90, PART 1**
The early years: Colorado's oldest birding organization hatches, fledges, and soars
- 24 From the Field**
A brief end-of-year review of yet another trip-packed DFO year
- 26 The Lives of Birds**
Canada Geese: A love-hate relationship with humankind for now — and ever?
- 38 Last Word, Last Look**
First Creek fence birds:
A gallery from the camera of John Breitsch

The Lark Bunting, formerly the monthly newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists, is the club's quarterly journal and is published online in January, April, July and October.

DFO On the Wing, the club's digital newsletter, is emailed monthly to all members.

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Submit time-sensitive, month-to-month news items, tips, announcements, photos and other materials to the monthly newsletter's editor at comm@dfobirds.org.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.



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**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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[DFO Leadership Page](#).



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy 90th birthday, DFO! And so we begin a year-long celebration of us

Sharon Tinianow

Over the last few months of 2024, several of us among the Denver Field Ornithologists volunteer staff began a fascinating exploration of DFO's history to set the table for our celebration of the club's 90th birthday this new year.

What great fun and surprising insights we had in gathering information for the first article (*in this issue on [page 14](#)*) of a fresh four-part history of DFO since its founding 90 years ago this month as the Colorado Bird Club. With *Lark Bunting* quarterly journal editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** and club historian and retired archivist **Kris Haglund**, I visited the DFO archives at Denver Museum of Nature & Science, which preserves the most complete record of our club's activities. **Laura Uglean Jackson**, the museum's chief archivist, worked with us to determine which items were of greatest interest.

First off, we examined the scrapbook of **Ruth Wheeler**, vice president of the bird club in 1936 and 1937. Fifty years later, as the club's last surviving charter member, Ruth received in 1988 the very first [DFO Ptarmigan Award](#), our club's highest honor. She richly deserved it. The records she kept were admirably extensive. Ruth collected items



From the scrapbook of charter bird club member Ruth Wheeler
DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

Continued on page 6

from the bird club's earliest days and clipped articles about birds, birding and the club. Ruth was also an avid photographer, and many of her invaluable snapshots of early club field trips are in that scrapbook.

The museum archives also contain the club's board meeting minutes and club correspondence from the start in 1935 to the present — except for one large but recent gap. Missing are the minutes from **1986 through 2012**. If anyone reading this has copies of those, please get in touch! We would love to complete the collection this anniversary year.

Pat and I also visited the Denver Public Library Central branch to see an eclectic boxful of clippings and other historical items contributed by the late **Catherine “Birdie” Hurlbutt**, another charter member of the club. If you've never heard of this colorful and committed Denver woman, you will in the second part of our new DFO history, due out in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting* in April. Not to be missed! The Denver Public Library's microfilm cache of most of the daily issues of *The Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News* also enabled us to retrieve articles about the Colorado Bird Club in the 29 years before it became DFO in 1964.

I should note that it was **Peter Burke**, editor of Colorado Field Ornithologists' quarterly journal, *Colorado Birds*, who reminded us that our club was founded on the heels of the landmark publication in 1934 of **Roger Tory Peterson's** trend-setting *A Field Guide to the Birds*. Peterson's slender volume was a gateway for bird enthusiasts like the predecessors who formed our club. Unique among nature guides of that era, it was small enough to fit in a pocket, and it weighed barely 1 pound, easy to carry into the field. Peterson also developed a visual language — combining simplified paintings of birds with clear, concise descriptions — to help amateur birders identify and study birds outdoors where they lived. Arrows directed attention to distinguishing field marks in the illustrations, an innovation that Peterson even trademarked so no other field guide could use it.

Prior to 1930, species were typically identified with the bird in hand — after shooting it. In the preface to his own 1903 volume, *Color Key to North American Birds*, pioneering field guide author **Frank M. Chapman** wrote: “From the scientific point of view there is but one satisfactory way to identify a bird. A specimen of it should be in hand in order that its form, color, and size may be accurately determined, when, with the aid of analytical keys, with which most text books are provided, it is a simple matter to ascertain the bird's name.” Chapman's 2-pound tome fit nicely on the bookshelf but not in the pocket.

Peterson, a student of painting in New York City in 1930, resolved to make a bird ID book that anyone could use in the field without having to capture or kill birds. The 2,000-copy first printing of *A Field Guide to the Birds* sold out in two weeks, even though the book was expensive at \$2 a copy — \$46.80 in today's dollars — just one year into The Great Depression.

What a time that must have been for the still-budding pastime of “bird watching,” a term coined at the start of the 20th century. Our club was formed just as birding became more accessible to the non-scientist.

I look forward this new year to more interesting stories and insights as we continue to re-connect threads of our club's history. **We especially hope that if you have a story or memory of DFO to share, you'll contact Pat or me.** We all have a place in the history of Denver Field Ornithologists, and we would love to talk with you about yours.

Good New Year's birding!



Scrapbook copy of the bird club's early logo, depicting a Lark Bunting
DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president and is a former editor of *The Lark Bunting*. Sharon began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.



Welcome to the “new” *Lark Bunting*

Patrick O'Driscoll

You're probably wondering: What's “new” here? This is still *The Lark Bunting* monthly newsletter that Denver Field Ornithologists has been publishing for decades, right?

It looks the same, but two words on the cover mark the difference: *Quarterly Journal*.

From now on, *The Lark Bunting* will appear every three months instead of monthly.

Although it looks like the previous newsletter, most of the journal's content will be less time-sensitive and more feature-oriented: birding articles, essays, field trip memories, photo galleries, and other non-urgent features not tied to this month or that.

This month, DFO also launches an email newsletter we're calling *DFO On The Wing* for the need-to-know-now stuff. It will combine monthly digest and club bulletin board to deliver appointment calendar-level info to your inbox when you need it, month after month. That means program meeting details, upcoming events, club business, field trip notes, and anything else with a right-now or coming-soon hook.

The timing is no coincidence. This new year marks DFO's 90th birthday, perfect timing to refine how we communicate with you, the members. As you will read elsewhere in this first of four DFO anniversary issues of *The Lark Bunting*, the club was founded in 1935 as The Colorado Bird Club. Twenty-nine years later, it changed names to Denver Field Ornithologists (1964) to avoid confusion when Colorado's new statewide birding organization, Colorado Field Ornithologists, was being formed.

And 2025 is also the 60th birthday of DFO's newsletter. In October 1965, the club created the ponderously named *Monthly Report of Field Observations of the Denver Field Ornithologists*. Six years later, *The Lark Bunting* was added to the name. Before long, they dropped the other words, and here we are.

Part 1 of *DFO @ 90*, our anniversary history of the club, is the main feature this month, with vintage photos, anecdotes and glimpses of the lives of our Denver birding ancestors. We'll also begin “The Lives of Birds,” a semi-regular essay series by DFO member **Jared Del Rosso**, a previous contributor to the newsletter. There's also an engaging photo gallery of “fence bird” pictures by the late **John Breitsch**, our DFO friend and field trip leader who bequeathed his 10,000-image Flickr account to the club before his death last summer. We'll also continue “Field Trips in Focus,” publishing pictures of DFO birders birding on some of the hundreds of field trips we lead every year.

What else would you like to see here? Let me know. If we wrote profiles of interesting club members, whom would you like to read more about? What about travelogues of cool birding trips or your own favorite DFO outings? Attention, bird photographers: The door is wide open for bird photo galleries. Show us what you've got!

Although we'll appear just four times a year (January, April, July and October), our retooled quarterly still needs your feedback, ideas and involvement. Contact me at patodrisk@gmail.com and let's enjoy together more words and pictures of the birds we love and the club we celebrate.

Good winter birding!

*Editor of The Lark Bunting since 2020, **Patrick O'Driscoll** took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he joined DFO in 2014 and became a field trip leader in 2016. In 2023, he received one of DFO's inaugural Peregrine Awards for innovation.*

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

*Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.*

DFO-LED DEC. 14 CHRISTMAS COUNT LOGS 103 SPECIES

The annual Denver Christmas Bird Count inside a 15-mile circle over Denver's west-southwest suburbs recorded 103 species in the preliminary tally of its Dec. 14 count day. Three more "count week" birds were also noted. "Everyone felt the birding was 'slow,' with low numbers of individuals for many species," said DFO member **Joey Kellner**, compiler of the annual tally. "However, we did note five species of goose, Long-tailed Duck in two locations, White-winged Scoter, two American Goshawk, three loon species (Common, Pacific & Yellow-billed), four owl species (Eastern Screech, Great Horned, Pygmy and Saw-Whet), five Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a singleton Golden-crowned Kinglet, and a Winter Wren."

Kellner classified as "big misses" the failure to record a single Wood Duck, Northern Pintail, Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk, American Pipit, or Harris's, White-throated or Swamp sparrow. "Very few ducks, very few White-crowned and American Tree sparrows, very few Townsend's Solitaires and American Robins," he added. "Are they all still north of us and still to come?" Kellner thanked participants and "all my AMAZING area leaders" as well as DFO member **Laura Steadman** "for whipping up a great potluck on short notice" to conclude the day's after-count compilation meeting at Chatfield State Park.

To check other Colorado Christmas counts, go to Audubon's (still incomplete) [state-by-state listings](#).

NEXT ON BIRD BOMBS: "RAPTORS FOR REAL" JAN. 23

In Colorado, birds of prey often abound in winter. But it's a challenge to identify them the way we usually see them — on the wing high overhead or sometimes perched in

hard-to-see spots. Online registration is now open for DFO's next free bird ID webinar, "BIRD BOMBS: Raptors for Real" — identifying winter raptors the way we see them in the field.

If you missed the most recent episode, "BIRD BOMBS: CBC (Christmas Bird Count) Explosion," the Zoom video is [now available](#). It's the 33rd episode in this popular series of Bird ID lessons led by David Suddjian, DFO's Field Trips chair, frequent trip leader and a birding instructor. (The entire series is on [YouTube](#).) The videos also are available in the video library on the [DFO webpage](#).

REGISTER FOR BIRD BOMBS



2024'S FINAL MONTHS IN FIELD: 41 DFO OUTINGS

DFO finished 2024 strong in the field, with 41 field trips in the final two months of the year, led by a combined 23 trip leaders. Birders on DFO's 19 November trips recorded 111 species on 57 checklists. Birders on December's 22 outings tallied 99 species on 93 checklists. For more about where DFO took birders on all those trips, check out the eBird combined trip reports for each month.

NOVEMBER RESULTS

DECEMBER RESULTS



Continued on page 9

'TIS THE SEASON: HOW TO HELP COMBAT BIRD FLU

[International Bird Rescue](#), the wildlife conservation emergency responders to oil spills and other accidents and events catastrophic for birdlife, has published a six-point guide to taking individual action against a winter outbreak of bird flu. The guidelines start with simple steps that birders especially should follow to prevent spread of HPAI (Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza): disinfecting shoe bottoms with bleach to block disease spread from tracking bird droppings, and cleaning backyard bird feeders weekly to prevent spread by birds that congregate around food.

They encourage prompt reporting to state wildlife agencies of sick or deceased birds, and wariness of “asymptomatic” birds in the field (especially ducks) that appear fine but may actually be infected. Finally, they recommend caution and protection (gloves and changes of clothes) around domestic bird flocks and farms. For more, visit [International Bird Rescue's web page on bird flu](#).

AUDUBON'S BEST 10 BIRD VIDEOS OF 2024

Everyone's familiar with National Audubon's top 100 photos in its annual [Photography Awards contest](#), which is announced in early summer. Less known but no less spectacular in their photography are the national organization's 10 favorite videos of birds from the 2024 awards. The subjects are all exceptional species to begin with: Black Skimmer, Sandhill Crane, Osprey, California Condor, Crested Caracara, American Bittern, Resplendent Quetzal, Waved Albatross, and Burrowing Owl twice . . . two different videos. All but one of the videos are under half a minute (and the longer one's only 31 seconds), so it's an easy diversion that won't suck up hours of your time.

WATCH 10 FAVORITE VIDEOS

Welcome to new DFO members

Cody Brown and Lia Ryan of Denver; Michael Chen and Jean Wei, Englewood; Claire Frazier, Arvada; Alyssa Reed and Janine Reed, Colorado Springs

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Mary Beverly, Jill Boice, Susan Clasen, Jean and Charlie Curlee, Jeanne Marie Dillon, David Driscoll, Andrea Duran, Ed Furlong, Mary Geder, Newell Grant, Angela Grun, Kristine Haglund, Stephen Hendrix, David Hill, Edie Israel, Judy Lane, Debra Lentz, Brian and Christine Macdonald, Bob Righter, Kate and Kyle Sandersen, Kris Saucke, David Shafer and Robin Sweeney, Paul Slingsby, Sharon Tinianow, Elaine Wagner, Laura and Wayne Wathen, Tom Whitten, Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele, Scott Yarberry, Deborah Zerkowitz

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DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Birgit Arvin, Kathy Barnum, Mary Beverly, Chris Blakeslee, Carol Cwiklinski, Laurie Duke, Ed Furlong, Betty Glass, Stephen Hendrix, Ashton and Dana Hiatt, Chuck Hundertmark and Marjorie Jannotta, Diane Hutton, Brian and Christine Macdonald, Richard Maslow, Senja and Mark Meiklejohn, Janet Peters and Michael Lupini, Bob Righter, Janet Shin, Paul Slingsby, Kate and Kyle Sandersen, Laura and Wayne Wathen





DFO members Kris Tita and Jim Estenat DFO's first Coffeehouse Chat Dec. 18 at Wash Perk Patrick O'Driscoll

COFFEEHOUSE CHATS

Pshhhhhhhhh! New DFO coffee get-togethers gaining steam

Hear that buzz? Coffeehouse Chats, DFO's new series of meetups to foster casual, in-person get-togethers, is *pshhhhhhh-ing* like a barista frothing up a double latté.

On Dec. 18, five of us met at the Wash Perk coffeehouse in Denver's Washington Park neighborhood to socialize over cups of morning Joe. It was a fun start to what we hope will become a regular third-Wednesday monthly practice. We've already got Coffeehouse Chats scheduled for January and March (*see below*).

After COVID shut down face-to-face attendance at program meetings, DFO shifted our monthly evening gatherings to Zoom. The webinar-based platform instantly made remote attendance simpler and more convenient, and it allowed DFO to bring in speakers from afar without the expense of travel from locations as distant as Australia and Costa Rica.

But not a few DFO members have since lamented that our only regular get-togethers since the pandemic are field trips, where socializing takes a backseat to birding. So these casual coffee meetups around the metro area aim to reconnect with old DFO friends and make new ones. Bring something to talk about — a birding topic, a DFO question, or anything else on your mind, bird-related or not — and spark a fun conversation. We aim to locate them near birding hotspots so pre- or post-meetup birding is an option.

Our next Coffeehouse Chat is set for **Wednesday, Jan. 15, 8:30 a.m.** at **St. Mark's Coffee House**, 2019 E 17th Ave., Denver 80206, which is just 3 blocks west of Denver City Park. If you'd like to join us, please RSVP to host **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com so we'll have a rough headcount. Afterwards, weather permitting, join Pat at City Park for a gander at geese and waterfowl (and other winter birds) on the park's lakes.

Leapfrogging another month ahead, the March get-together is also set: **Wednesday, March 19, 8:30 a.m.** in **Centennial**, at the "coffeehome" of **Kathy Holland**, DFO treasurer. Spots abound nearby for birding before or after Kathy's Coffeehouse Chat, including the Marjorie Perry Nature Preserve, Highline Canal Trail, and Horseshoe Park. RSVP the host at kcloudview@comcast.net for more details. (BTW, Kathy says she is equipped to make espresso, lattés and Americanos, and "I'll have some breakfast treats, too.")

If you can't make our January or March *kaffeeklatsches*, we're lining up sessions for February and into spring. Prospective hosts are exploring coffeehouses from Littleton (Hudson Gardens, Aspen Grove) to west Denver's Highlands neighborhood and beyond. Look for specific dates, times and locations this month and thereafter in DFO's new monthly email newsletter, *DFO On The Wing*.

How about inviting fellow DFO'ers to a coffeehouse near where you live and bird? Please consider hosting a future Coffeehouse Chat. If you're interested, drop an email note to DFO president **Sharon Tinianow** at sharontinianow@gmail.com.



Nic Korte
Lee Gelatt Photography

WINTER PROGRAM PREVIEW

No Boundaries for Wildlife: Saving Tropical Birds in Colorado

Nic Korte
Monday, Jan. 27, 2025
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

There's no missing the call to well-informed activism — especially where Mother Earth is concerned — in that familiar turn of phrase, “Think globally, act locally.” Longtime western Colorado wildlife conservationist **Nic Korte** suggests that North American birders try putting a Western Hemispheric twist to it: Think *tropically*, act locally.

Korte says he'll detail that in “*No Boundaries for Wildlife: Saving Tropical Birds in Colorado*,” his DFO evening program on **Monday, Jan. 27, at 7 p.m. MST** via Zoom webinar. Korte's presentation was originally scheduled for last August, but had to be postponed and now marks the first DFO program of the new year.

“Local actions here affect birds in the tropics,” Korte says, explaining his tropical focus. “Some of those birds spend part of their lives in Colorado. Avoiding palm oil in products you buy helps not just the birds whose year-round tropical habitat might be saved, but also birds that live part of the year here in North America.”

Korte, a 40-year resident of Grand Junction, has been the conservation chair of Grand Valley Audubon Society for more than two decades and a board member for nearly three. He also leads the society's Western Screech-Owl observation project.

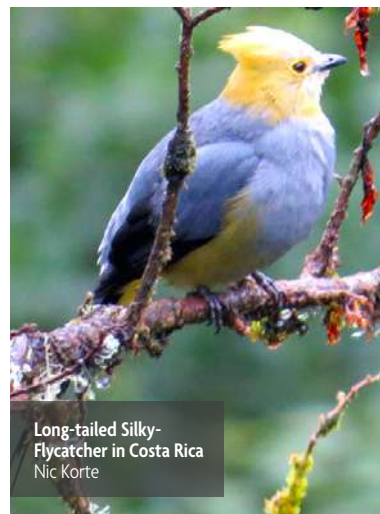
He has also made more than 30 trips to the tropics and wrote a book, *Ten Jungle Days* (Outskirts Press), that

combines human and natural history, personal memoir and nature discovery travel in the Costa Rican rainforest. His encounters there include exotic amphibians, anteaters, climbing rats, spider monkeys and “the delightful siren call of extraordinary birds.”

Korte grew up in the farmlands of rural southern Illinois, where “the only way to express outdoor interest then was hunting and fishing.” But the family's 1956 edition of the *World Book Encyclopedia* revealed Nic's true interest. “The ‘B’ volume,” he says, “had several very worn pages — the pages on birds. I wore them out looking at them.”

He became a geochemist, but after graduate school, he worked at the University of Arizona in Tucson, “where I actually encountered birders” for the first time — and found a life's hobby.

In 2015, Korte received Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' **Richard G. Levad** Award for “distinguished service to the ornithological community.” In 2019, National Audubon awarded him its **William Dutcher** Award for “leadership in the birding community of Western Colorado.” Follow his blog at [Birds and More – Birding and Conservation in Western Colorado](#).



Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher in Costa Rica
Nic Korte



WINTER PROGRAM PREVIEW

Colorado: We Need to Talk About Ravens

Nathan Pieplow
Monday, Feb. 24, 2025
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

Colorado bird authority **Nathan Pieplow**, a frequent DFO speaker in past years, returns in 2025 to challenge and enlighten us on an unexpected topic for a man best known for his command of birdsong and bird sounds:

How do we tell Colorado’s two raven species, Chihuahuan and Common, apart from each other? And why might we be doing a lousy job of it with some of the photographs we post to eBird?

Pieplow’s presentation, “*Colorado: We Need to Talk About Ravens*” (**Monday, Feb. 24, 2025, 7 p.m. MST** via Zoom webinar), springs from reading a [recent article](#) by **David Sibley**, the renowned national birding artist and expert, in *North American Birds*, the journal of the American Birding Association. Pieplow says Sibley proposed that at least half, and maybe up to 90%, of photos submitted to eBird from Colorado as Chihuahuan Ravens might actually be Common Ravens. “If this is true,” Pieplow adds, “then the conventional wisdom on raven status, distribution, and identification needs some serious revision.”

Pieplow will review what we know about ravens and how we know it, including Sibley’s recent innovations in identification criteria and an in-depth listen to raven voices. Along the way, he’ll talk about raven intelligence and what that means for their vocal communication. And he’ll pose this question: “If we’ve been getting the ravens so wrong, what other accepted species records might need revisiting?”

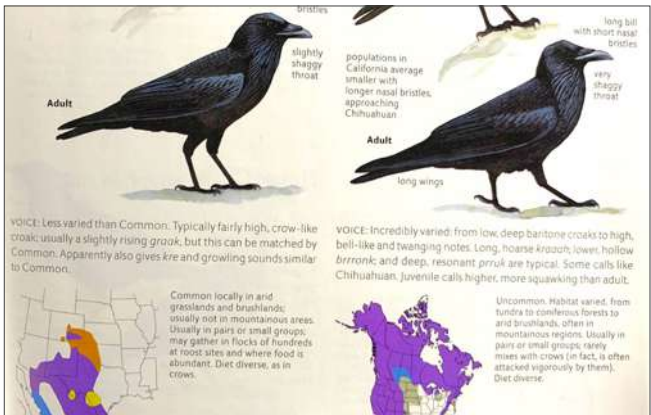
He will also discuss how birding authorities validate unusual sightings in Colorado, including reports of Chihuahuan Ravens

beyond the southeastern quarter of our state that is the northernmost part of the species’ range.

A decade ago, Pieplow wrote about the role of voice in telling Chihuahuan and Common ravens apart in Colorado on [Earbirding](#), a bird-sounds blog he co-authored through the 2010s. Pieplow’s most recent DFO appearance was in August 2022, when he entertained us with “The Best Bird Songs You’ve Never Heard.”

Pieplow wrote the *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds* (with separate volumes for western and eastern North America), and he is former editor of Colorado Field Ornithologists’ quarterly journal, *Colorado Birds*. He is also an author of the [Colorado Birding Trail website](#).

A native of South Dakota, Pieplow grew up fascinated by birds. Now based in Boulder, he is an assistant professor of writing and rhetoric at the University of Colorado Boulder.



Chihuahuan Raven, left, and Common Raven, side by side in *The Sibley Guide to Birds*

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO's November program

DFO keeps a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring programs. If you could not attend our most recent program live via Zoom, click the “WATCH ONLINE” link below to view the recording on [DFO's YouTube channel](#).



Thanks to DFO historian **Kris Haglund** for editing and posting videos of other past programs, which can be viewed on the DFO website's [Past Programs](#) page.



Jessie Reese during Zoom presentation

NOVEMBER 23

The American Dipper, a Magical Mountain Friend

Jessie Reese

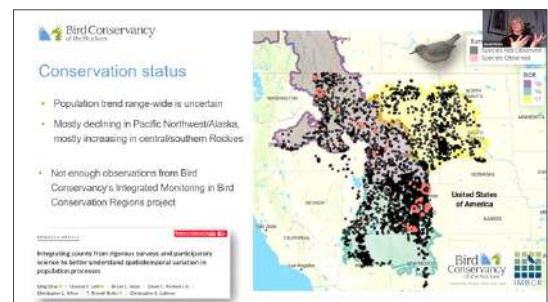
Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies research scientist **Jessie Reese** pursues a wide range of scientific projects in her professional work. But she makes clear in this Zoom presentation that her “magical mountain friend” is a personal subject of deep interest and fascination. After describing birdlike career migrations that brought her to Colorado in 2019, Reese shows a video of her first encounter early in 2020 with an American Dipper just half a block from her Fort Collins home. She was “super excited” to see a dipper this fall in that same spot for the sixth year in a row.

Throughout the talk, she harks back to that Spring Creek Trail location to illustrate dipper fidelity to favored streams, but also to note that some dippers fly from one drainage to another, an unexpected behavior she’s witnessed herself. She also sprinkles her overview of the species with dipper trivia and “myth-busters.” How come you rarely see dippers in August? They’re hiding from predators because they molt so many feathers at once that they can’t fly. That “dipper” name? It’s not for the bird’s frequent dipping underwater, but for its constant body-bobbing *out* of the water. And that bright-white eye flash when it blinks? It’s not the “second eyelid” nictitating membrane, but rather the dipper’s main eyelid, composed of tiny white feathers.

We’re fortunate to live in one of the species’ most concentrated and active ranges — and to have bird lovers like Reese to enlighten us about the American Dipper’s interesting and endearing presence.

WATCH ONLINE



Screen grabs from Zoom webinar on dippers

The early years: Colorado's oldest birding organization hatches, fledges, and soars

*Editor's note: This month, Denver Field Ornithologists celebrates 90 years as a birding club. To mark this milestone, DFO is researching and drafting **DFO @ 90**, a fresh history of our club in four parts.*

Beginning here with Part 1, chronological chapters will appear in succession through 2025 in four issues of The Lark Bunting, refitted from DFO's previous monthly newsletter into a new quarterly journal. Parts 2, 3 and 4 will appear in the journal's April, July and October issues.

A bird club in Colorado has been the dream or ideal of bird lovers for a long time. Tonight we are celebrating the first anniversary of such a club. To you, Mrs. Wosnuk, belongs the credit. It has taken initiative, courage, determination, and a great deal of time and effort. We appreciate what you have done. The members of the CBC join with me in saying, Thank You, Mrs. Wosnuk, for making our dreams come true.

— **Lillian Wagnild**, Jan. 16, 1936

Sharon Tinianow

Those words of tribute — delivered at a gathering of Denver birdwatchers in the midst of the Great Depression — acknowledged the energy and expertise that bird enthusiast **Helena K. Wosnuk** devoted to starting a nature group dedicated to enjoying and appreciating Colorado's wild birds. One year earlier, Wosnuk, a 39-year-old public health nurse, and fellow birdwatcher **Margaret Pritchett** invited other bird lovers to an organizational meeting to form a bird club.

On Sunday, Jan. 27, 1935, 22 people gathered at the Colorado Museum of Natural History (now the Denver Museum of Nature & Science) in Denver City Park. Guiding the group's formation was **Dr. Robert J. Niedrach**, the museum's curator of ornithology.

Continued on page 15



Images top to bottom:

Early Colorado Bird Club logo depicting Lark Bunting
DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

Bird club co-founder Margaret Pritchett, in WWI-era portrait,
played violin for Denver Symphony
J.A. Shirley IV via findagrave.com

Early depiction of Lark Bunting, the state bird, on a Colorado
Bird Club scrapbook
DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

HELP! Send DFO memories, photos for new club history

Help us write and illustrate the history of our club's first 90 years!

NEEDED for any years in which YOU have been a member are ANECDOTES, STORIES and PHOTOS from your time in DFO. Field trips, monthly meetings, picnics and more: We want any and all of your MEMORIES

MISSING from DFO's archives are the club's meeting minutes from **1986 through 2012**. If you have or know of copies of any records from this 27-year gap, PLEASE get in touch at the emails below

YOUR help will make **DFO @ 90** as complete and accurate as possible. YOU are the history of our club, from nearly a century ago to now. Email DFO president **Sharon Tinianow** (sharontinianow@gmail.com) and *Lark Bunting* editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** (patodrisk@gmail.com) about what you REMEMBER and what materials you HAVE of your time in DFO. Every memory and snapshot is welcome. Thank you!

DFO @ 90 cont from page 14

Helena and Margaret's spark to start the club had been struck in Niedrach's University of Denver "City College Extension" class in ornithology for adults. Wanting to continue their study of birds, they issued a bulletin for others of like minds to join them. Both were new to ornithology and to organizing. Pritchett, 42, was a violinist in the Denver Symphony Orchestra and lived with her parents and sister. Wosnuk, married to a disabled veteran of World War I, **John Wosnuk**, was taking a class at DU in administrative work. She welcomed the experience she would gain from organizing a club.

At that first meeting Jan. 27, the assembled bird enthusiasts discussed the many activities they could engage in together as a club. To organize, they elected officers to serve one-year terms. Helena agreed to be president, Margaret took on the role of secretary, and **Robina Storrie** became vice president and treasurer.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

They also discussed what to call themselves. All three of the club names first proposed had "Robert J. Niedrach" in the title, prompting Niedrach to thank the group but to suggest instead that a more general name would be better.

At the time, the only bird-related organization in the state was the Colorado Audubon Society, formed in 1913. The new group eventually settled on The Colorado Bird Club. Its members had no inkling that their modest venture would grow through the 20th century and well into the next, changing names in 1964 to Denver Field Ornithologists. That first get-together 90 years ago was the birth of today's DFO.

Club dues were set at \$1 per year (the equivalent of \$23 today). Meetings would be the third Thursday of the month at 8 p.m. in the museum's Children's Room, which was free for the bird club's use. In March, the club filed State of Colorado papers of incorporation to make the CBC official. By then, the club had 48 charter members.

Bear in mind that just one month later, President **Franklin D. Roosevelt** signed into law the Works Progress Administration, which would employ millions of jobless Americans. Amidst widespread economic stress and social upheaval, our Denver birding ancestors banded together to form a club. Their invention fed their passion for birds, got them outdoors and helped to push back their troubles and cope.

To frame CBC bylaws and conduct club business, the membership added a board of directors to their leadership. Besides the three officers, the first board included **Donald Harrison, Lillian Hunt, Edith Wiberg, and Clara Tate**. DFO's present-day mission statement still mirrors the words of the two-fold statement of purpose they wrote:

- *Promoting interest in the study and preservation of birds and their habitats*
- *Supporting local and national movements for birds' protection*

Continued on page 16

From that first year forward, the Colorado Bird Club met monthly except in June, July and August, when members planned summer birdwatching field excursions. The meetings began with social time and refreshments, and business was kept to a minimum to devote more time to learning about birds and their habitats. Programs at those early gatherings featured local speakers.

William S. Green, Jr., who taught biology at East High School across Denver City Park from the museum, spoke about Colorado mammals. **Irene Scott Taylor** gave a talk titled, "Birds we found in Texas and Old Mexico." At one meeting, someone read aloud an article from *Bird Lore* magazine titled, "Preservation of Bird Life." At another meeting, Niedrach addressed "The Technique of a Museum Preparator," demonstrating how his team preserved birds for research collections.

MEETINGS, PROJECTS . . . AND FIELD TRIPS

Attendees at these early meetings also shared bird observations, discussed a schedule of summer field trips, and noted new books about birds. In April of 1935, they observed the 150th anniversary of the birth of **John James Audubon** and discussed a variety of potential projects. At that same meeting, board member Clara Tate passed around a study skin, obtained from a birding friend in Mississippi, of a non-native species that was rapidly expanding its range in the U.S. — the European Starling.

That first summer would mark the start of the club's primary endeavor: Field trips. The excursions usually ran on both days of the weekend. The first of these was a bird outing and picnic on June 16, 1935 at Elk Creek Ranch, half a mile west of historic Shaffer's Crossing near present-day Staunton State Park.

Forty-nine people in 13 cars traveled 25 miles up from Denver as ranch guests of the **R.T. and Luci Davis** family. Club members **Catherine Hurlbutt** (later a well-known Denver bird rehabilitator and activist known to all as "Birdie" Hurlbutt) and **Clara Tate** directed morning and afternoon hikes that day. Using an outline Niedrach created, the trip participants kept a full bird list. The club minutes later noted, "A number of high altitude birds were observed in their nesting activities and heard in song" — from three Spotted Sandpiper nests with eggs and young to a Williamson's Sapsucker nest in an aspen, and calls of Hermit Thrush and Warbling Vireo. The first checklist included robins, jays, magpies, grouse, wrens, swallows and hummingbirds, "swooping up into the ether, then darting vertically down, settling on a willow branch with quivering wings."

Continued on page 17



Images top to bottom:

Bird club members with "wounded" Great Blue Heron, foreground left, on a 1935 outing

Ruth Wheeler via DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

Lunchtime on July 11, 1948 club outing to Summit Lake near Mount Evans

DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

Bird club members Margaret Pritchett and Margaret Smith on May 1938 field trip to Devil's Head in Douglas County

DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

That July, a dozen club members ventured up to Estes Park on the club's first overnight trip, staying at the YMCA of the Rockies. Local trips in August and September 1935 included a visit to a state fish hatchery on Brighton Road. As DFO historian **Warren I. Finch** would note later in his 2003 account of the club's early years, "half-day field trips were held from April to November on Saturday, starting at noon because most people worked Saturday morning (44-hour week), but trips were taken all day on Sunday." Another Finch draft of the history included a list of 20 different club outings in 1939. They ranged from the South Platte River, Denver City Park, Echo Lake and Genesee Mountain Park to destinations both obscure and well-known, including several long before they became state parks (Barr Lake, Castlewood Dam, Roxborough Park).

The CBC took up conservation issues right from the start, too. Those who attended the May 1935 meeting voted to urge passage of two bills before Congress to designate federal land as wildlife habitat under the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act. A resulting letter to Interior Secretary **Harold L. Ickes** read:

"The Colorado Bird Club, Inc. takes this opportunity of expressing its deep interest in the Government to set aside suitable territory on the public domain as refuges for wildlife in connection with the setting up of grazing districts to be established in the near future and in expressing the hope that this may be done."

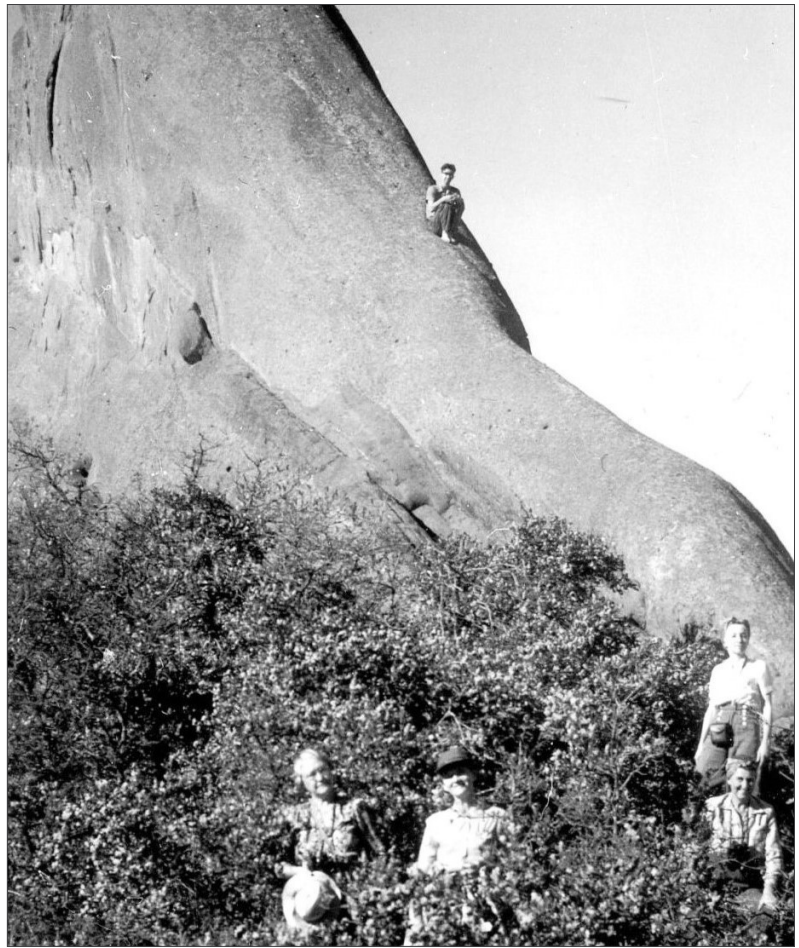
At the same meeting, members read and discussed the Migratory Bird Act No. 3933, a treaty with Mexico that followed the landmark bird protection pact signed with Canada in 1916.

ROUNDING OUT YEAR ONE

Meanwhile, club president Wosnuk worked with the Garden Club of Denver to oppose the use of live Mourning Doves as targets for bird hunters in Denver, as there was an open season on shooting doves. When the Colorado State Conservation Council was formed, the Colorado Bird Club was invited to send delegates.

By November of its first year, the CBC had formed two new committees for programs and parks. The first one organized the monthly meetings and printed postcard reminders to mail months in advance. The second committee investigated locations for a bird sanctuary in Denver. Bird feeding stations were set up in urban parks, and eventually (1940), Denver Mayor **Benjamin F. Stapleton** approached the club about that bird sanctuary idea.

Each time the club met, members got a report on the most recent field trip and an announcement about the next ones coming up. Meeting notices were even published in the Denver newspapers and posted in libraries. By the CBC's first anniversary in 1936,



Club member Jim Humphrey halfway up a Roxborough Park hogback in October 1948 with his wife and three other birders below (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

Continued on page 18

membership had ticked up to 57 members. **Charles H. Hanington**, president of the Colorado Museum of Natural History, welcomed and invited the club to continue using the museum for its meetings.

At the same time, the CBC began to publish pamphlet-sized annuals that highlighted field trip activities and programs, and contained the names and addresses of every member of the club that year. These yearbooks, club meeting minutes and scrapbooks kept by a couple of mindful members served for decades as the club's only historical record.

GETTING “INK” AND ATTENTION

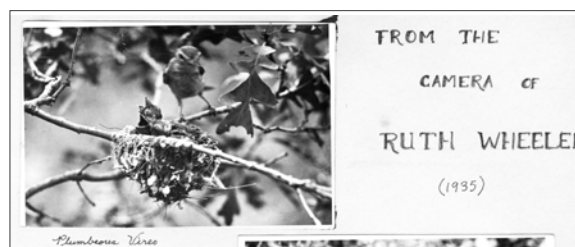
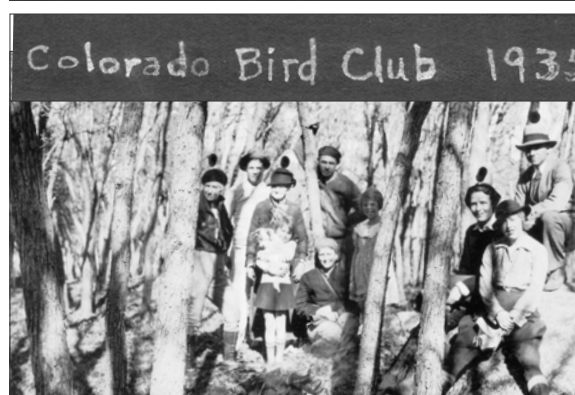
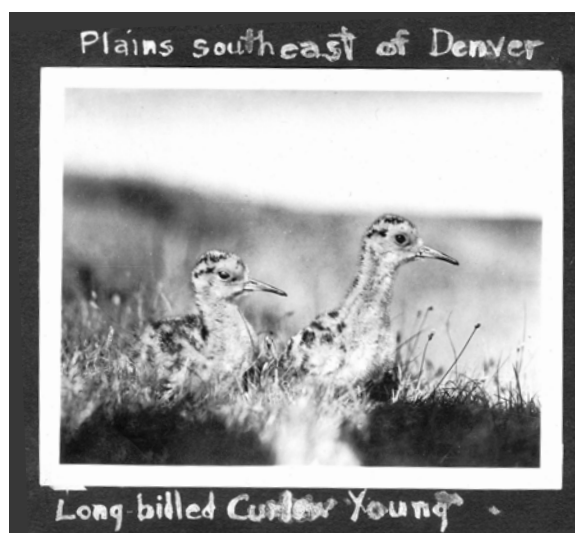
In August 1937, an article in *The Denver Post* described the CBC as “unique and interesting among the numerous clubs in the city . . . unusual in its aims” for the members’ devotion to birds. Unlike typical meeting-oriented clubs of the day, this one led outdoor trips “en masse to some isolated spot near Denver to study birds,” *The Post* wrote. “They are taught the proper procedure in searching for the birds, in detecting their habits and in finding their nests. So enthralled have these men and women become with nature study that their meetings and trips are a vital part of their lives.”

Later that year marked Colorado’s first involvement in the National Audubon Society’s Christmas Bird Count, a national effort begun in 1900. That 1937 count took place in Jefferson County and involved only four birders. It was led by club adviser Niedrach and his colleague **Alfred M. Bailey**, later co-authors of the seminal two-volume, 895-page *Birds of Colorado* (1965), the bible of the state’s birdlife. In the early 1950s, the Colorado Bird Club took over Audubon’s “Denver” Christmas count, a 73-year tradition that current count compiler **Joey Kellner**, a longtime DFO member and field trip leader, carries on today.

Over the years, the bird club inevitably made changes to its structure. More officers were added and the number of directors rose to nine. New committees ventured into additional areas of club operations, from grant-making to communications and outreach. Early on, the CBC even created a portable library on wheels of bird books and magazines.

Field trips, core club activities from the start, steadily increased in number, destinations and scope year after year — and they still do today. Besides more than 200 trips annually, DFO now has new wrinkles like “Birds Plus” outings that combine birding with related pursuits, from wildflowers, reptiles and history to photography, geology and nature journaling.

Continued on page 19



Images top to bottom:

Juvenile pair of Long-billed Curlews found and photographed on a 1930s bird club outing (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

First-year club outing in unidentified Colorado woods (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

Boys handle bird specimens in museum class by bird club founding adviser Robert Niedrach (Municipal Facts via, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

Photo of vireos in nest from 1935 scrapbook page of Ruth Wheeler, charter club member (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

COPY of
Document OF INCORPORATION
for
The Colorado Bird Club from
STATE OF COLORADO

Office of the Secretary of State.
United States of America,) ss. CERTIFICATE
State of Colorado)

I, James H. Carr, Secretary of State
of the State of Colorado, do hereby certify that-----
-----HELENA K. WOSNUK LILLIAN HUNT-----
-----CLARA C. TATE ROBINA C. STORRIE-----
-----EDITH M. WIBERG MARGARET E. PRITCHETT---
-----DONALD HARRISON-----

Citizens of the United States, and residents of the
State of Colorado, being desirous of forming a corpora-
tion (not for pecuniary profit,) under and by virtue
of the provisions of Chapter Nineteen (19) of the
General Statutes of the State of Colorado, entitled
"An Act to Provide for the Formation of Corporations"
Approved March 14, 1877, have made, signed, acknow-
ledged, and this-twentieth---day-of---MARCH---A.D.1935
at the hour of--11:30-o'clock, A.M. filed in my office
the Certificate of Incorporation of THE COLORADO BIRD
CLUB.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, We have hereunto set our hands

CHARTER MEMBERS
THE COLORADO BIRD CLUB
1935

Robert J. Niedrach	Elizabeth Henry Brown
Lillian Hunt	Luda Bunker
Virginia Christensen	Donald Harrison
Emil W. Christensen	Ida M. Anderson
Clara C. Tate	Emelia H. Anderson
M. Eugenia Walker (Now Mrs Kaupp)	Jessie Force
Gertrude R. Seyler	Cora B. Page
Lillian Wangnild	Elizabeth Swan
Ada Swan	Emma C. Dexheimer
Laura Looms	Edna McLaughlin
Edith Sewell Douglas	Wm S. Green, Jr.
Madeline F. Buck	Sue Frances Dougan
Ruth Wheeler	Laura H. Ziegler
Cornelia Ortgysen	Anna M. Longan
Mary E. Kirsher (Now Mrs. Crow)	Katherine Marx
Mabel B. Ellis	Alberta O. Kirkpatrick
John F. Wosnuk	Marguerite M. Sutton
Edith Voris	Kathrine Harrison
Bertha Feldwisch	Otto Friedrichs
Mary K. Edmiston	Virgil E. Knowlton
Ada E. Gay	Betty Jane Hughart
Leila Simpson	Julia M. White
Belle W. Dickinson	Alice P. Roberts
Berness Bunker	Emma B. Huck

Top: Copy of Colorado Bird Club's original incorporation document in 1935 (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)
Bottom: Original typewritten roster of the club's charter members in 1935 (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

GOODBYE DEPRESSION, HELLO WAR

By 1938, membership had almost tripled, to 155 individuals, as the nation toiled to exit the Great Depression. Within three years, America's sudden entry into World War II after Pearl Harbor ended the depression but upturned everything else. As some bird club members left home to join the fight, CBC voted to protect the memberships of all active-duty personnel, putting them in "inactive" status for the duration. Wartime gas rationing curtailed regular field trips, and trip leaders were urged to plan outings that could be reached easily by streetcar or bus.

But the club carried on with the programs about birds — and on occasion, about other critters. In 1943, **Joseph A. Bixby**, Denver's city forester, spoke about a homefront menace: the city's ubiquitous Fox Squirrel. In a program titled, "The Truth About the Squirrels of Denver," Bixby believed the cute rodents were to blame for a 15-year lack of nesting hummingbirds in town. Squirrels were notorious for raiding backyard "victory gardens," a vital source of wartime food for families. They nested in attics and scavenged patio furniture for nest materials, too. Bixby advocated population reduction by live-trapping (shooting was against the law) for release in the foothills to forage for themselves.

In December 1944, the club again appeared in the local news. *Rocky Mountain News* writer-photographer **Harriet Rhoads**, a.k.a. "The Rambling Camera Girl," would pose a question to a group of people, then share their responses in print with photos of those quoted. This time, Harriet asked folks at a Colorado Bird Club meeting, "What kind of bird do you think is most helpful to man?"

George W. Roberts, then club president, replied, "Nearly all birds are helpful, and man cannot live without them." **Charles Ford Hansen**, recording secretary, said, "There are so many useful birds — those that destroy insects and others that prey on rodents." **Edith Voris**, vice president, added, "The more you learn about them the more you want



MEMBERS IN THE ARMED SERVICE

Boyd, Alvin L.

Cooper, Kenneth

Fishburn, Bob

Fitzgerald, Bob

Green, William S.

Kleinschnitz, Fred

Landau, Dexter S.

Posel, Sidney L.

Rauch, Elizabeth

Rockwell, F. L.

Smith, Margaret

Tillquist, Leonard

Wilk, Joseph A.

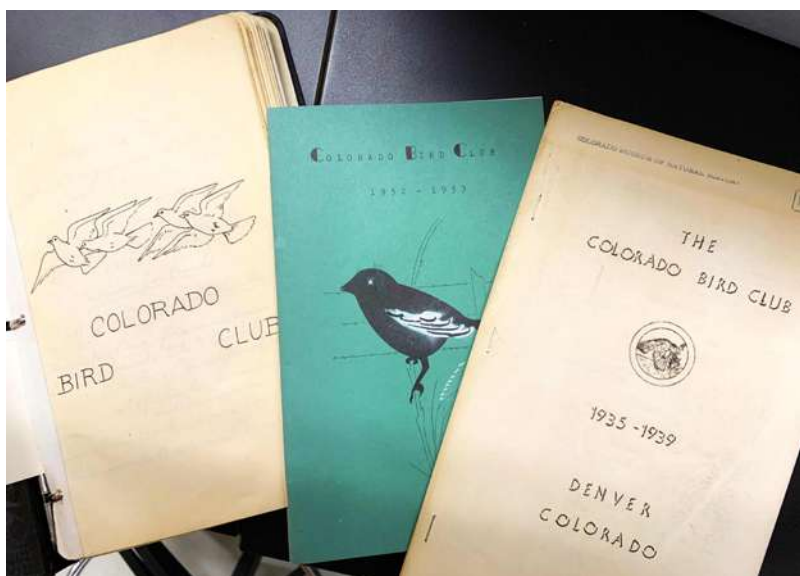
Images top to bottom:

Ferruginous Hawk on cover of club's 1945 yearbook (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

Burrowing Owl on cover of club's 1946 yearbook (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

1940s club yearbook page of club members in military during World War II (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

Continued on page 21



Pamphlet-sized annuals from the club's early years (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

DFO @ 90 cont from page 19

to know." Member **Ruth Wheeler** noted, "I couldn't say just one, for too many are useful. Even hawks and owls are helpful, for they clear up rodents. Only a few hawks are destructive." **Ralph L. Asbury** replied, "My favorite bird is the owl — it has so much character."

Remarkably, through the war years, nothing in the minutes of the club's monthly meetings ever referred to the war. Having pulled out of a depression and faced the global catastrophe of a second world war within a generation, the Colorado Bird Club kept going and serving its purpose, providing a needed distraction from the battlefronts of Europe and the Pacific.

A DECADE DONE, AND MORE TO COME

The club's 10th anniversary arrived early in 1945, the climactic year of the global wartime ordeal. With the conflict's approaching end, bird club leaders contemplated the future of their still-young organization. They discussed ways to increase membership, presumably lower after years of homefront hunkering down and absent servicemen and women. Suggestions included lowering dues for those under age 18, and engaging Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops. But the club, reluctant to stray into politics from its founding focus on birds, did deny a request for time by the League of Women Voters to speak at one of the monthly meetings.

Great relief must have been palpable at the regular meeting on Sept. 25, 1945 — just three weeks and two days after Japan's surrender formally ended the war. In retrospect, six words that CBC secretary Hansen wrote in the official minutes of that night's first post-war gathering were a promising sign of things ahead: "*A gratifyingly large attendance was noted.*"

The club for the study of birds — formed in the depths of the Great Depression and still together through the trials of World War II — was on solid footing and focused ahead on its second decade. New members assumed leadership roles. Co-founder Margaret Pritchett resigned from the CBC board after leading a number of projects through the early years. Co-founder **Helena Huron** (formerly Wosnuk, a last name she and her husband changed because it was too hard to pronounce) died in 1951 and was buried in Denver's Fairmount Cemetery, where DFO field trips today still lead birders among the tombstones.

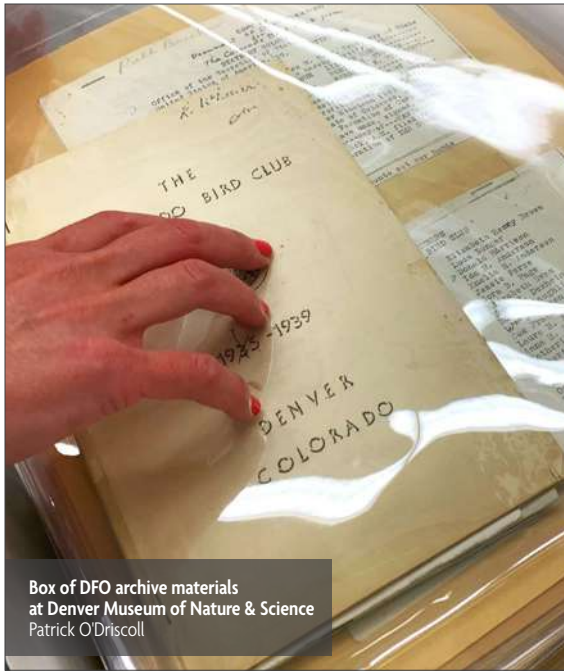
Ahead on the early 1950s horizon were a dues increase to \$2 a year . . . a new spring bird count . . . Boy Scouts at a club meeting, working on bird merit badges . . . the first *Colorado Bird Notes*, a new bulletin of club goings-on . . . mimeographed bird checklists for CBC members' use in the field.

One member who joined in 1953 had walked past the bird club's museum meeting place daily as a Park Hill schoolboy. Between January 1947 and May 1950, he checklisted birds on his commute through City Park to East High: wigeons, shovelers and Mallards on the way to class, and chickadees, creepers and juncos on the way home.

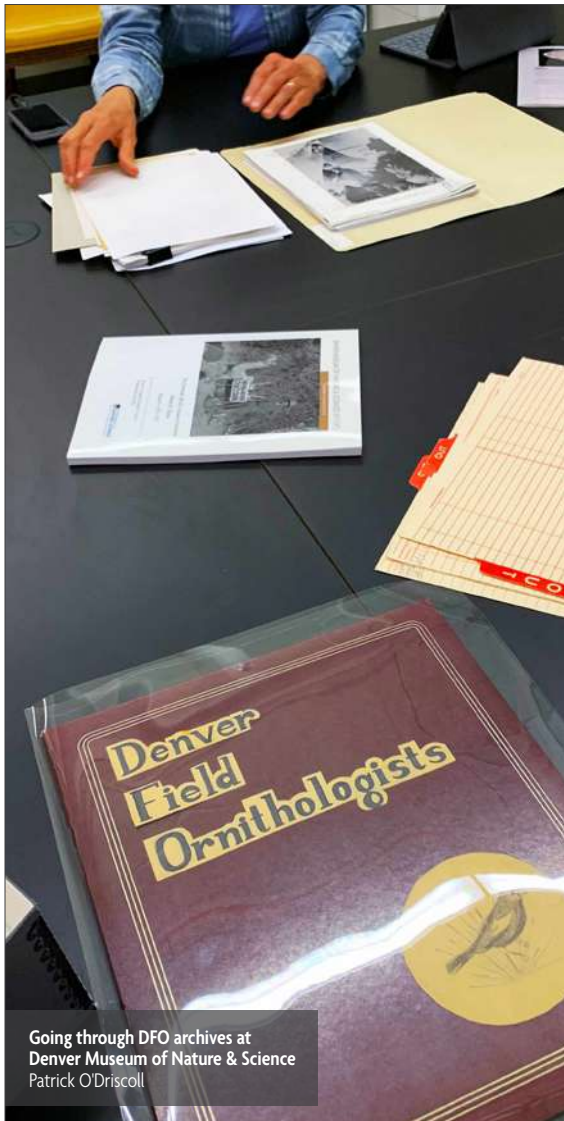
Much later in life, that long-ago teen — having since served as DFO president, led innumerable field trips, edited Colorado's *Breeding Bird Atlas* and organized decades of seasonal bird counts — is now our club's longest-serving member: **Hugh Kingery**, present-day dean of Colorado birders.

Hugh's 72 years in the Colorado Bird Club and DFO span the rest of our club's history, which we'll continue to retell here when we return in April with Part 2 of *DFO @ 90*. Until then, good winter birding!

About *DFO @ 90*



Box of DFO archive materials
at Denver Museum of Nature & Science
Patrick O'Driscoll



Going through DFO archives at
Denver Museum of Nature & Science
Patrick O'Driscoll

To mark the 90th birthday of Denver Field Ornithologists in 2025, DFO is producing *DFO @ 90*, a four-part historical narrative of the club's nine decades so far. The project team includes club president **Sharon Tinianow**, club newsletter/journal editor **Patrick O'Driscoll**, and club historian **Kris Haglund**, with assistance from other members and outside supporters.

Source information for our research includes DFO records, meeting minutes, photos, yearbooks and other materials in the club archives at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. The original Colorado Bird Club (renamed DFO in 1964) held its meetings there for the first 29 years of the club's existence, when DMNS was the Colorado Museum of Natural History. As DFO, the club continued to meet in the museum through 2018.

DFO thanks the DMNS Archives Department, led by **Laura Uglean Jackson**, for its generous time, expert curation of DFO's records and invaluable assistance in this historical research.

The DFO archive also contains invaluable scrapbooks, photos and memorabilia that were kept through the years by history-minded charter members of the club, including co-founder **Margaret Pritchett** and **Ruth Wheeler**. Ruth was later the first recipient of the [Ptarmigan Award](#), which DFO created in 1988 to honor her as the last living charter member from 1935. The team also relied on a previous DFO history written in 2002-03 by club historian, former president and Ptarmigan awardee **Warren I. Finch** (1924-2014).

Further research in the Denver Public Library's Special Collections and Archives included club-related material, popular press accounts, microfilm collections and the scrapbook archive of original member **Catherine A. "Birdie" Hurlbutt**. DFO thanks the Central Library's archives staff for friendly and plentiful assistance to the project team.

Tinianow is chief writer of *DFO @ 90*, with O'Driscoll editing, revising and augmenting with additional research gathered by the team. Thanks also go to club members who responded to the project's request for their own DFO-related memories and accounts with materials and sitting for interviews.

The *DFO @ 90* team appeals again to members for accounts and memories. Please help us compile as complete and accurate a living history of our club as possible. To contribute your words, photos, ideas and recollections, please contact Tinianow at sharontinianow@gmail.com and O'Driscoll at patodrisk@gmail.com.

FIELD TRIPS

Still time to vie for spot on DFO's southeast AZ "Sky Islands" threepeat!

Patrick O'Driscoll

The first two times in 2023 and 2024 were already the charm, but this year's excursion to southeastern Arizona's bird-rich "Sky Islands" region will be a charmer, too. **BIRDING ALERT:** The **Wednesday, Jan. 15 deadline** to register for a chance to join this May 15-26, 2025 trip is approaching fast.

Veteran DFO trip leader **Joey Kellner**'s previous two expeditions to the Southwest's best birding locale were smash hits. Many participants had life-bird bonanzas during the 12-day driving expedition. Kellner says the trip "is designed especially for those that have never been to this area of the country."

The group will visit many popular birding hotspots, including the Chiricahua, Santa Rita, Huachuca and Catalina mountains. Habitats range from desert grasslands and Sonoran Desert thorn scrub and cacti to riparian corridors and the pine-studded "sky islands" of the mountains. "This is not specifically a 'target species' trip, but a general southeast Arizona trip that will immerse the participants in wonderful habitats." At least 6-8 species of hummingbirds are likely, including specialties like Violet-crowned, Lucifer and White-eared. So is Elegant Trogon, a hoped-for "lifer" among first-timers.

The all-inclusive cost is \$2,600 per person, which includes rental vehicles, lodging, gas and food, leader's expenses and land/access fees. Unspent funds at the end of the trip will be refunded to participants; Kellner notes he is "not profiting financially from this trip." Accommodations are double-occupancy (participants paired by gender) in a combination of commercial hotels and "in-habitat" lodging. "Think about waking up to birds and birds sounds you've never seen or heard before!" Kellner notes. Meals are a combination of "on-the-go" breakfasts and lunches (sandwich shops, grocers, fast-food) and sit-down restaurant dinners most nights to relax, recap that day's discoveries and discuss the next day's plans.

But there's only room on the trip for eight birders total (two full rental vehicle loads), so selection is by a modified combination of previous waitlisters and random drawing. Kellner explains: "Due to the popularity of this destination . . . anyone who signed up for this trip in 2023 and 2024 and did not make the cut (three individuals) and desires to go in 2025 will automatically be selected." The rest should "put your name in the hat by registering **prior to Jan. 16** for this field trip."

Registration is already open on the DFO Field Trips page. On Jan. 16, seven participants besides Kellner will be chosen by random pick from registrants who meet gender requirements for room sharing. Their \$800 deposits are due by Feb. 1 to reserve their spots. The remaining balances are due April 15. Participants who cancel after April 15 forfeit their deposits. Registrants planning to share a room with a spouse or friend should both register and, when registering, add the other person's name in parentheses in the "emergency contact" box on the DFO trip registration form online.

Other questions? Contact Kellner at vireol@comcast.net. A detailed itinerary with locations and potential species will be sent to all who sign up on the DFO trip registration webpage.



Mexican Spotted Owl on DFO
SE Arizona expedition in 2023
Rob Raker

REGISTER FOR SKY ISLANDS FIELD TRIP



FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

A brief end-of-year-end review of yet another trip-packed DFO year

David Suddjian

Quiz time: Which all-volunteer organization hosted 250 free public field trips in 2024, with 52 individual leaders and nearly 500 different participants? (Hint: Its initials are D, F, and O.)

Thanks to so many volunteers, members and friends, Denver Field Ornithologists had another remarkable year doing what we do first, last, and best: Field trips.

Participants on DFO outings in 2024 recorded 378 bird species (315 in Colorado) on nearly 1,300 eBird checklists. DFO birded in 50 of Colorado's 64 counties. And 2024 was the year our club completed DFO's eBird map for the state, coloring in the last four of those counties where we had never led birding excursions before.

For all that activity, it was surprising that we added only one new species all year to DFO's own life list — and it's not even native to North America. It was a single Chukar (a Eurasian partridge introduced as a wild game bird in the western US during the mid-20th century) on a field trip near Cameo in Mesa County. But hundreds of trip participants marked lifers of their own on our trips, some of them by the dozens.

Continued on page 25



Pursuing poorwills on June 8, 2024
field trip in Ken Caryl Valley
Scott Hammel

DFO's "Birds Plus+" initiative was a significant new feature for 2024. This ongoing series of individual field trips pairs our usual birding activity with related field focuses. These bird outings were enhanced by immersion into aspects of botany, history, geology, nature journaling (in word and art), photography and more. Participants expressed excitement at opportunities to enjoy new disciplines in the field.

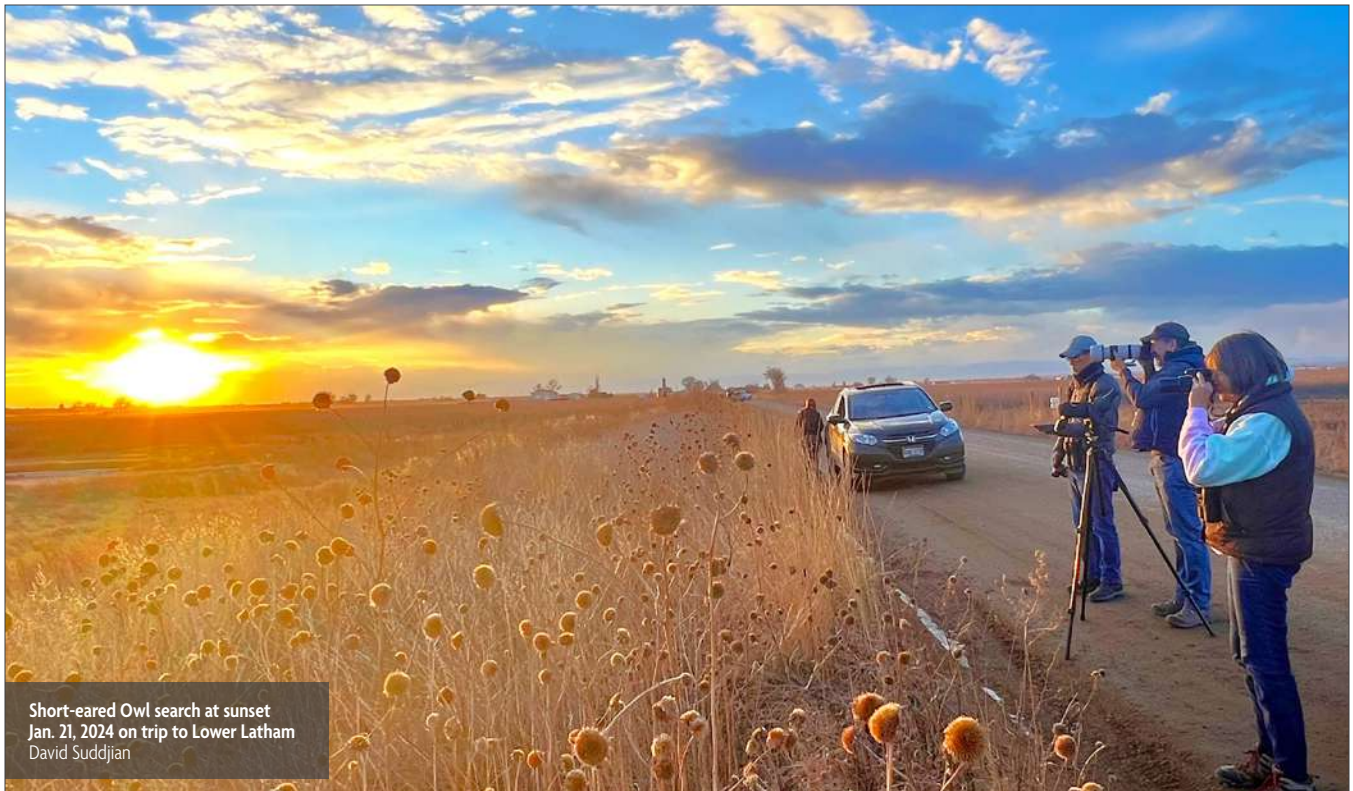
Forty-two DFO certified leaders led trips in 2024, joined by 10 more guest leaders on some of the Birds Plus+ trips. I imagine this was the biggest team of leaders ever for DFO, and we welcomed five new trip leaders to the fold. Ten DFO leaders led six or more field trips in 2024: **Ajit and Liza Antony, Jason Bidgood, Nate Bond, Charlie Chase, Carly Crow, Ben Jacques, David Suddjian, Gary Witt and Gigi Zarzuela**. Special thanks goes to Joey Kellner for leading another *12-day trip* to the "Sky Islands" of southeast Arizona (which he'll do again for a third time this spring).

It was a pleasure to gather trip leaders together for a midsummer appreciation picnic and walk in Genesee Park on July 27. And with similar great appreciation, we acknowledge trip leader **Diane Roberts**, who announced her retirement near year's end as a trip leader.

Diane first led a DFO trip in 2018 and led or co-led 65 field outings since then. These included many trips to far-ranging destinations in Colorado, as well as overnight outings to New Mexico and Wyoming. Diane's sense of adventure, knowledge of birding places, and great ability to spot birds made her field trips entertaining and enlightening for all.

Happy new birding year to all, and here's to many 2025 field tripping experiences as filled with discovery and satisfaction as those in 2024 were.

David Suddjian, DFO Field Trip chair since 2021, has led more than 550 club outings. He joined DFO after moving to Colorado in 2013 from his native California. He organized DFO's 2018 "Big Year" and created the "BIRD BOMBS" series of bird ID webinars. He received one of DFO's first Peregrine Awards for innovation in 2023





THE LIVES OF BIRDS

Canada Geese: A love-hate relationship with humankind for now — and ever?

“One swallow does not make a summer, but one skein of geese, cleaving the murk of a March thaw, is the spring . . . (A) migrating goose, staking two hundred miles of black night on the chance of finding a hole in the lake, has no easy chance for retreat. His arrival carries the conviction of a prophet who has burned his bridges. A March morning is only as drab as he who walks in it without a glance skyward, ear cocked for geese.”

— Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

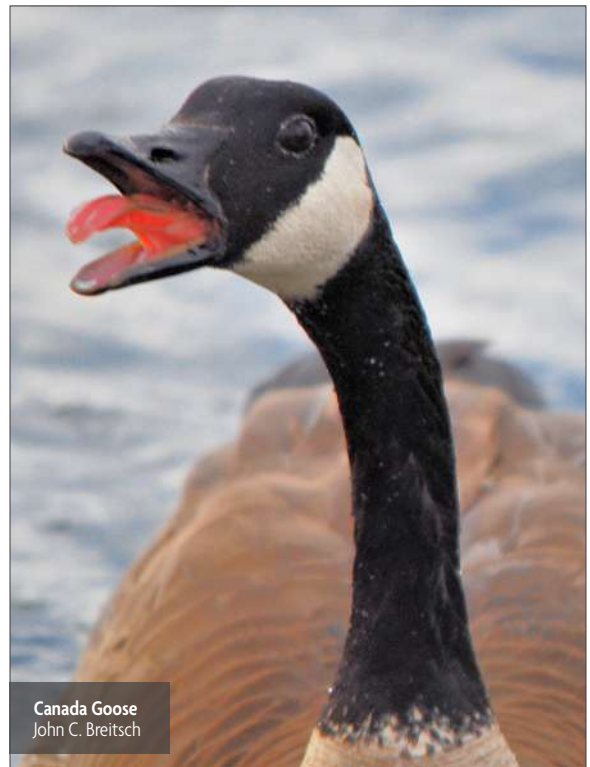
Jared Del Rosso

How far we’ve come since the great conservationist Leopold lionized the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*). Now ubiquitous on the American landscape, Canada Geese are ultra common and, to many birders, unremarkable. For our non-birding neighbors, the birds’ goslings may be adorable urban companions. But the parents of those goslings? Hissing threats that chase after runners, dogwalkers, curious toddlers and, yes, even birders.

Not to mention their reputation as urban blights. Green goose droppings cover and smear park walkways, fill our puppies’ mouths (ugh!), and track home with us on the bottom of our shoes. No wonder some deride them as “lawn cars” — or, as the director of parks and recreation in Greenwich, CT memorably described them in 1992 to *The New York Times*: “Flying rats.”

But you already know this, because over the past few decades, America’s continental conflict with urban and suburban geese reached Colorado and the Front Range. It simmers today in the suburbs, where communities contract with “pest management” companies to chase our mixed flocks of white-cheeked geese — Canada and Cackling Geese — out of one green space, golf course or subdivision and into another. In the cities, the frontlines are often our great parks, where vast lawns, lakes and ponds sustain year-round populations (an estimated 5,000 birds) plus tens of thousands more in migrant flocks that overwinter here and return to Canada in spring to hatch and fledge more geese.

Colorado’s own “[Goosinator](#),” a brightly colored, remote-controlled monstrosity dreamt up and marketed by two Lakewood brothers-in-law, chases away metro Denver geese with scary painted fangs and the menacing buzz of its propeller. Groundskeepers use more



Canada Goose
John C. Breitsch



Canada and Cackling Geese in
Ferril Lake, Denver City Park, 2018
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 27



Colorado-made Goosinator used to chase geese off park ponds, golf courses
Goosinator.com



Canada Goose atop a van in a Centennial shopping center in 2023
Jared Del Rosso

THE LIVES OF BIRDS *cont from page 26*

lethal strategies, too. Denver Parks & Recreation oils eggs laid by resident geese to suffocate would-be goslings before they ever hatch. In 2019, the city even culled growing permanent flocks in several parks in a [controversial series of goose roundups](#).

Other cities and suburbs across the US wage similar battles. But like most instances of “nuisance” wildlife, the perceived challenge of residential geese is largely self-inflicted. In his book *Nature Wars: The Incredible Story of How Wildlife Comebacks turned Backyards into Battlegrounds*, **Jim Sterba** describes how human practices of hunting, conservation, and suburban development established resident populations of Canada Geese throughout much of our country.

The story centers on a single and mostly non-migratory subspecies: *Branta canadensis maxima*, or the Giant Canada Goose. Sterba writes that goose hunters commonly used members of this subspecies as living decoys to attract migrating geese to ponds and lakes. After the federal government prohibited the use of live decoys in 1935, the subspecies lost its purpose to hunters. They sold some of them to communities that set them free on local ponds and lakes. State and wildlife departments bought others to establish local, non-migratory populations.

According to a [2014 *Journal of Wildlife Management* article](#) on Canada Geese in Colorado, our state had but one breeding population in the 1950s and only one winter concentration. Around the same time, the Colorado Department of Game and Fish (now Colorado Parks and Wildlife) began transplanting three subspecies here, including the Giant Canada. The transplantations continued into the 1960s east of the Continental Divide and the 1970s west of the divide.

Continued on page 28



Canada Goose family crossing street
Patrick O'Driscoll

At the same time, urban and suburban planners here and across the US created parks, golf courses, campuses, cemeteries, shopping centers, and other spaces that would serve geese as much as they serve people.

Geese, it turns out, have the same kinds of preferences and insecurities as most of us do. Like urban and suburban humans, they love green expanses of lawn and also get flighty around predators. Since the mid- to late 20th century, we have “managed” wild threats from coyotes, mountain lions and bears — as well as domestic risks from neighborhood strangers and unleashed dogs. But our manicured turfs, so pleasing to human eyes, are also a tasty, three-season bluegrass buffet to goose palates. We and the birds both also love water, so the puddling of our communities with ponds and streams attracts the geese, too. Since neither geese nor humans like hunting in the neighborhood, that activity moved out, and we and the geese settled in side by side.

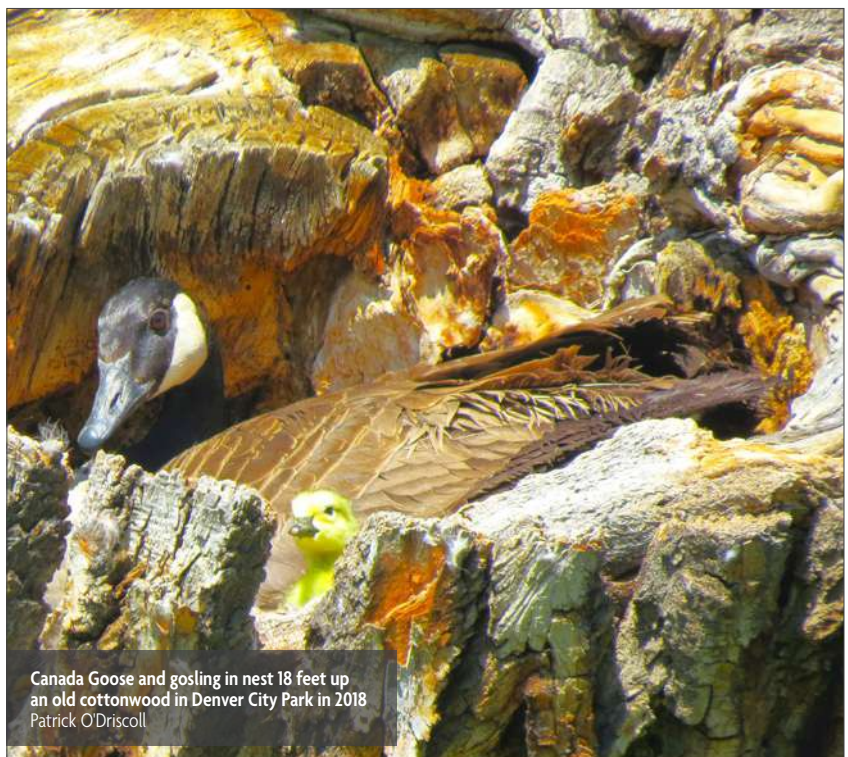
In other words: We invited geese to join us. We gave them a dream habitat as we built our own dream neighborhoods. No wonder the non-migratory flocks have stuck around for good. Meanwhile, their out-of-town relations are far more numerous, conspicuous and among us in the winter.

In fact, the number of migratory Canada and Cackling Geese totaled during Audubon’s Denver Urban Christmas Bird Count (a Jan. 1 tallying of birds in a 15-mile circle over central Denver and a part of Aurora) has increased dramatically over the past 30 years. In the 1990s, the Denver Urban count logged roughly 115,000 white-cheeked geese, an average of about 11,500 annually. The 2010s saw the total spike to nearly 240,000, more than doubling the average annual count to about 24,000. Although the

Continued on page 29



Six gosling siblings in Denver's Ferril Lake in 2024
Patrick O'Driscoll



Canada Goose and gosling in nest 18 feet up
an old cottonwood in Denver City Park in 2018
Patrick O'Driscoll

numbers are slightly down in the 2020s, the first five counts this decade averaged about 22,100 Canadas and Cacklings a year, just below those for the 2010s.

The increase is even more spectacular in Madison, WI, where Aldo Leopold himself taught courses on wildlife. Madison's counts in the 1980s tallied fewer than 250 white-cheeked geese a year. In the 1990s, the count ballooned to nearly 3,000 annually. It continues to grow: Since 2020, Madison has averaged more than 13,000 geese each year, the vast majority of them Canadas.

Were he here today, Leopold would be disoriented by the lack of seasonality among 21st-century geese. One skein of geese no longer means much. Sometimes, all it means is that someone's off-leash dog in a local park chased a flock into the air.

Perhaps we can no longer rely on the arrival and departure of geese for messages about the seasons. But their presence still contains truths. Whether we mean to or not, for good reasons or bad, human intervention in the lives of wild species has changed them. It has also changed us, and our experience of nature.

How many people today still spend March with an ear cocked for geese, as did Leopold? Or watch the birds with the wonder expressed in **Mary Oliver's** much-loved poem "[Wild Geese](#)"? Oliver's wonder and Leopold's awe at Canada Geese may seem strange today when the birds are such common residents and visitors. Maybe the geese are just background noise — semi-tame creatures waddling and foraging on suburban lawns and asphalt, popping up in goofy locations like treetops or the roofs of cars and buildings.

Our resident geese may yet have other messages for us. The enormous *Branta canadensis maxima*, our urbanized Giant Canada Geese, might inspire interest in birds among city folk, especially young ones. Canada Geese are not family, but they are familiar. They live among us, in our most conspicuous places — grassy medians, empty ballfields, the edges of city ponds. No need for us to skulk around in the undergrowth to observe them, either, as we do with smaller, more skittish urban birds. No need to be a birder, carry binoculars, or use the Merlin app to ID them.

Until writing this, I hadn't considered that a Canada Goose might be my spark bird. As a birder, I'm drawn to the insectivores — especially nightjars and flycatchers. It's no surprise that my "discovery" of the [Eastern Phoebe](#) in my native Northeast hooked me on birding. Although it was ever-present in my previous 30 years there, I hadn't realized the species existed!

Writing this essay, I now wonder about the Canada Goose that briefly lived with my family in the Hudson Valley of New York. I was 8 or 9 years old, in the summer of 1989 or '90. Two decades before I became a birder, this goose looked back from the cemetery next door, took brief flight and joined me in our backyard.

"Our" goose hung around awhile — days, maybe weeks. Seeming half-tame, half-wild, it bathed in a small plastic pool we kept for it. Eventually it would depart, of course. But the memory of it did not. Nor did the spark of curiosity it brought to me about the lives of birds.



Childhood photo of the author (2nd from left) and family with Canada Goose (preening) in their backyard playpool

The Lives of Birds will be a recurring feature of The Lark Bunting quarterly. DFO member and birder **Jared Del Rosso** is also a wildflower gardener and sociologist with a special interest in urban and suburban nature. He's writing a book about Whip-poor-wills in American culture. Read more at his blog [The Lonesome Whip-poor-will](#).



November-December DFO trips *In Focus*

Fall migration and early winter DFO field trips in November and December 2024 included 41 total outings. Of those, participants on 21 trips took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 90-year-old club. If you’re on DFO trips in January, February and March, please take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best for the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, which beginning in 2025 will publish quarterly. Send .JPG or .PNG photo files of birders in the field, with date/location of trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline for our April 2025 spring-quarter issue is **Friday, March 28**. Thanks!

NOVEMBER 3 **Littleton** (Arapahoe County)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Virginia Gulakowski, Jonathan Hebel, Angela Hebel,
Nicole Callaway, Gigi Zarzuela, Kenneth Stuckey,
Sue Summers

Field trippers on an unnamed pond on the South Platte River
during Nov. 3 outing to several Littleton locations
(David Suddjian)



NOVEMBER 3 **Fairmount Cemetery/ Highline Canal** (Denver)

Leader

Jason Bidgood

Participants

Marjorie Middleton, Steve Methven, Sandra Hoyle,
Jacqueline Gorman, Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine,
Linda Klumpers

Birders in the snow on Nov. 10 field trip to Denver's
Fairmount Cemetery and High Line Canal
(Jason B. Bidgood)



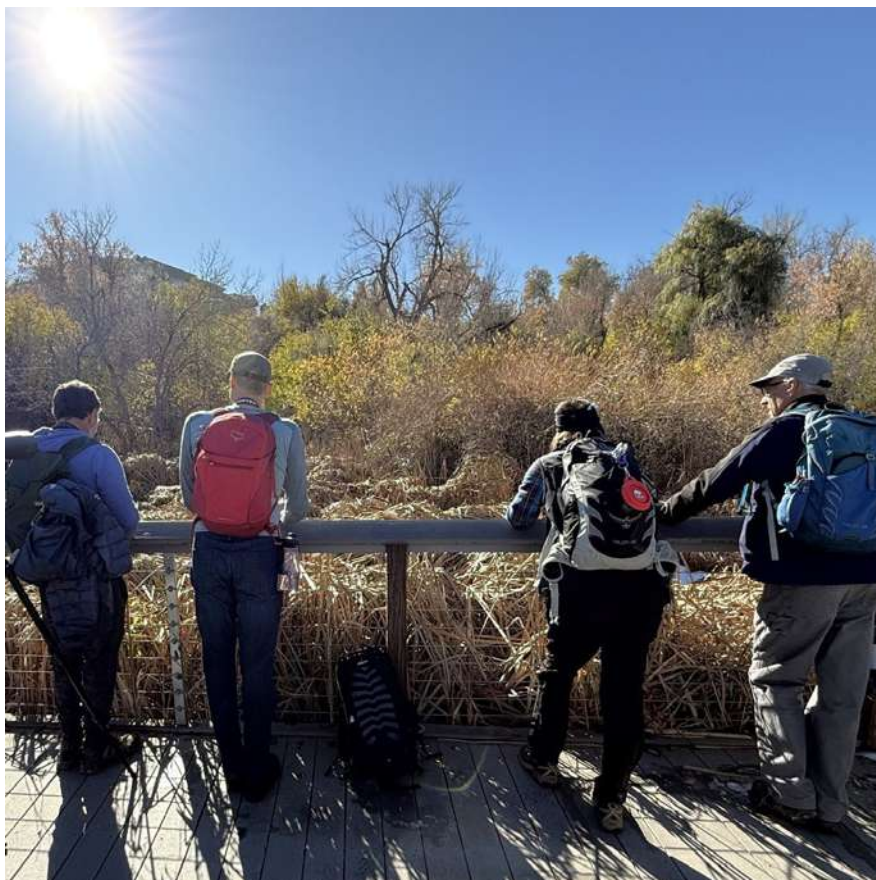
Continued on page 31

NOVEMBER 11
Waterton Canyon
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Bonnie Prado, John Batt, Patricia Kuzma Sell, Amy Manning,
Nick Podsiadlik, Joel Jones, Anne Craig, Oliver Urdiales, Kris Saucke

Veterans' Day birders focus on cooperative Canyon Wren
during Waterton Canyon field trip Nov. 11
(David Suddjian)



NOVEMBER 14
**Prospect Park /
Wheat Ridge Greenbelt**
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Nave Prentice, Sandy Mathias, Kris Tita,
Gigi Zarzuela, Nadiyah Watts, Kris Sauck

Field trippers pause for Virginia Rails below
Bass Lake boardwalk on Nov. 14 outing to
Prospect Park and Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
(Nadiyah Watts)

Continued on page 32



NOVEMBER 15
Park County Reservoirs
(Park)

Leaders

Joe Tuttle and David Suddjian

Participants

Jennifer and Robert Tonge, Debra Strike,
Andrea Duran, Courtney Rella, Kelly Ducham,
Coreen Spellman Bailey, David Strike,
Linda Cunico

Bundled against 6-degree temperatures,
Nov. 15 field trippers scan thousands of distant
waterfowl on glassy Spinney Mountain Reservoir
(David Suddjian)

NOVEMBER 17
Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
(Adams)

Leader

Jason Bidgood

Participants

Virginia Gulakowski, Timothy Condon, Michelle Trotter,
Jeanne Marie Dillon, Kris Tita, Morgan Kahle, Nicole
Callaway, Julia Auckland, Linda Klumpers, Sue Summers

Field trippers at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR view waterfowl
from floating bridge across east neck of Lake Ladora
(Jason B. Bidgood)



NOVEMBER 23
Bluff Lake Nature Center

Leader

George Ho

Participants

Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine, Brandy
Margeson, Shai Ronen, Virginia
Gulakowski, Rae Jones, Nicole Callaway,
Linda Purcell, Kathleen Bahr

Participants on the Nov. 23 DFO trip to
Bluff Lake Nature Center in Denver pose
together on lake's boardwalk
(George Ho)



Continued on page 33



NOVEMBER 29

Pueblo area (Pueblo)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Ryan Corda, Chip Dawes, Linda Cunico,
Ryan Dibala, Jeff Dawson, Robin Trevillian

Birders scoping Pueblo Reservoir on Nov. 29
field trip to the Pueblo area
(Ryan Dibala)

DECEMBER 1

First Creek @ DEN Open Space (Denver County)

Leader

Patrick O'Driscoll

Participants

Felice Lyons, Steve Methven, Sandra
Hoyle, Michelle Trotter, John Batt,
Sofia Prado-Irwin, Ryan Corda, Rosanne
Juergens, Emily Scheler, Marjorie
Middleton, Scott Hammel

Participants on Dec. 1 DFO field trip to First Creek
@ DEN Open Space focus on a pair of Great
Horned Owls in trees along the creek
(Patrick O'Driscoll)



DECEMBER 5

Birds + Bird Photography, "Raptor Alley" near Nunn, CO (Weld)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Dave Prentice

Participants

Julia Gwinn, Cynthia Breidenbach, Ryan Corda, Linda
Purcell, Diana Egan, Peggy Gonder, Stephen Sears

Focusing in on birds of prey on Dec. 5 DFO field trip in Raptor
Alley near the northeastern Plains town of Nunn in Weld County
(Dave Prentice)

Continued on page 34



DECEMBER 8
Denver City Park
(Denver)

Leaders

Patrick O'Driscoll and Archer Silverman

Participants

Cody Brown, Shai Ronen, Lynn Slaga, Susan Blansett,
Jayne James, Debra Lentz, Steve Methven, Sandra Hoyle,
Cheryl Ames, Linda Wyatt

Dec. 8 field trippers in Denver City Park put eyes and lenses on
Dark-eyed Juncos on south shoreline of Duck Lake
(Patrick O'Driscoll)

DECEMBER 8
Barr Lake State Park
(Adams)

Leader

Jason Bidgood

Participants

Kris Saucke, Linda Klumpers, Michelle Verostko, Kris Tita,
Brady Anderson

Birders on DFO field trip on Dec. 8 to Barr Lake SP scan the south
shoreline
(Jason B. Bidgood)



DECEMBER 8
Birds + Nature Journaling, Audubon
Kingery Nature Center & Trails
(Jefferson)

Leader

Carly Crow

Participants

Paula Rosson, Amy Manning, Andrew and Michelle Husko,
Timothy Condon, Jennifer Tonge

Participants in Birds + Nature Journaling field trip Dec. 8 to
Audubon's Kingery Nature Center work indoors on their journal entries
(Carly Crow)



Continued on page 35

DECEMBER 15

Bear Creek Greenbelt (Jefferson)

Leaders

Gigi Zarzuela and David Suddjian

Participants

Patricia Kuzma Sell, Lark BenDaniel,
Kris Tita, Ryan Corda, Virginia
Gulakowski, Shai Ronen, Cassandra
Stroud, John Featherstone

Separate DFO and Denver Audubon field
trips ran into each other Dec. 15 at Bear
Creek Greenbelt and birded on together
(John Featherstone)



DECEMBER 19

West Littleton (Jefferson, Douglas, Denver)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Catherine Millard, Linda Purcell, Phil Waltz

Field trippers sorted Cackling Geese for a Snow X
Cackling hybrid at Hine Lake in Robert Easton Regional
Park during Dec. 19 outing through southwest metro
locations around Littleton
(Phil Waltz)

DECEMBER 22

Gull Therapy (multiple counties)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Dana Hiatt, Anne Craig, Ryan Corda, Phil
Waltz, Michelle Trotter, Jason Bidgood

Scanning Cherry Creek Reservoir near marina for 3
kinds of loons and 5 kinds of gulls on Dec. 22 field trip
(Phil Waltz)



Continued on page 36



DECEMBER 22
Washington Park
(Denver)

Leader
Jason Bidgood

Participants
Beth Partin, Shai Ronen, Jeanne Marie
Dillon, Kris Tita, Eileen Warner, Debbie Fox

Birders on Dec. 22 field trip to Denver's
Washington Park look high to sort out a Brown
Creepers from a mixed flock
(Jason B. Bidgood)

DECEMBER 28
**South Platte River,
Littleton to Denver**
(Arapahoe, Denver)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Cate de la Garza Millard,
Marjorie Middleton, Lance and Sharon Tanaka,
Jenny Germano, Cassandra Stroud, Virginia Gulakowski

DFO birders on South Platte River trail in Denver
Dec. 28 during field trip with holiday "Platte Bowl"
duck-spotting competition (divers vs. dabblers)
(David Suddjian)



Continued on page 37

DECEMBER 29

Northern Saw-whet Owling in Ken Caryl Valley Area (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Cynthia Breidenbach, Julia Gwinn, Lynn Slaga,
Coreen Spellman, Lance and Sharon Tanaka

Happy DFO owlers on very successful Jefferson County pre-dawn
search Dec. 29 for Northern Saw-whet Owls (9 heard, 1 seen)
(David Suddjian)



DECEMBER 29

Boulder County Raptor Tour

Leaders

Donna Stumpp and David Suddjian

Participants

Ryan Corda, Paula Rosson, Dave Prentice,
Linda Gathany, Phil Waltz, Kathy Cisar,
Amy Manning

Field trippers focus on a Golden Eagle during Dec. 29
raptor ramble in Boulder County
(Dave Prentice)

DECEMBER 31

South Platte River @ 88th (Adams)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Archer Silverman

Participants

Catherine and Kevin Millard, Kris Tita,
Cheryl Ames, Michelle Verostko, Becky Russell, Linda Purcell,
Sarah Feigelson, Jayne James, Caroline Armstrong, Ryan Corda

Co-leader Archer Silverman, center, points out a bird on New Year's Eve
field trip along South Platte River at 88th Avenue
(Linda Purcell)



LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

**First Creek fence birds:
A gallery from the camera
of John Breitsch**





Top: Merlin, December 2014, Bottom: Vermilion Flycatcher, May 2018
Previous page: Brewer's Sparrow, May 2016

Patrick O'Driscoll

"Good fences make good neighbors," **Robert Frost** wrote in his poem *Mending Wall*. As we birders know, they make good perches, too — for birds. Our avian friends aren't particular. Any urban chain-link boundary, suburban grape-stake barrier, rangeland barbed wire strand or weathered wooden post in a prairie pasture will do.

I think of this whenever I visit First Creek @ DEN Open Space, the scrubby strip of riparian cottonwoods, grassland, prairie dogs and walking paths wedged between the east boundary of Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR and the Peña Boulevard access corridor to Denver's airport.

The first time I birded there, in 2016, I was with **John Breitsch**, the late DFO field trip leader and friend whose passion for that place in his northeast Denver backyard put three First Creek hotspots on Denver's birding map. As we walked up pot-holed Buckley Road between the Arsenal and the prairie dog town, John kept pausing to photograph every bird he saw along the Arsenal's chain-link barrier.

"Fence birds," John replied when I asked why.
"I love fence birds."

The birds' use of man-made boundary markers suggests a basic symbiosis between them and us. They get convenient hunting perches, safety lookouts and resting spots above the grass, weeds and ground predators. We birders get a sturdy, studio-like prop and backdrop to frame our camera shots and admire the whole bird above any view-obscuring vegetation. Win-win.

Before John died of cancer last August at the age of 60, he bequeathed to Denver Field Ornithologists his [10,000-image cache of bird photos on Flickr](#). Since then, I've been poking through the photographic trove. I paused (for now) when my tally reached 102 shots of more than 75 species on fences of all kinds. John shot the majority of them along the Arsenal/Open Space fence lines.

In a New Year's salute, here's a gallery of First Creek-area fence birds from the camera of our departed friend. I hope you enjoy them as much as John did.

All photos by John C. Breitsch, pictured at right.



(Beth Payne)



Top: House Wren, August 2017, Bottom: Wilson's Warbler, September 2016



Top: Bullock's Oriole, June 2017, Bottom: Western Kingbird, August 2017



Top: Loggerhead Shrike, October 2017, Bottom: Lark Sparrow with food, June 2018



Top: Dark-eyed Junco, January 2017, Bottom: American Robin, March 2017



Top left: Say's Phoebe August 2018, Top right: Eastern Bluebird, November 2017, Bottom: Harris's Sparrow, March 2018



Top: Lincoln's Sparrow, May 2018, Bottom: Green-tailed Towhee, September 2018

Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
HAPPY WINTER BIRDING!





THE LARK BUNTING

QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 61 | ISSUE 2 | APRIL 2025

DFOBIRDS.ORG

DFO @ 90 HISTORY, PART 2

Niedrach & Bailey
take DFO under wing

PAGE 18-26

LIVES OF BIRDS

Hummers make our
garden blooms smile

PAGES 33-36

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

“Industrial” birding:
gems in gritty Denver spots

PAGES 46-54

BACK STORY

Gull vs. crayfish:
Who’s got whom?

PAGE 55



dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS
90th Anniversary

Bushtit
Dave Prentice
Overland Park, Denver



ON THE COVER

Bushtit: Short-named, tiny-bodied builder of big, extended-family nests

Patrick O'Driscoll

Look closely: This month's cover bird, a female Bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*), is nothing but business at this all-business time of the year. Cover photographer **Dave Prentice** found her on March 20 in Denver's Overland Park, along the South Platte River about four miles upstream from downtown. She (and no doubt her mate, somewhere nearby) were gathering the makings of their nest.

Prentice watched the yellow-eyed female (male eyes are black) "for a couple of minutes as she pulled spiderwebs from an old spider nest." You can see some of the web matter there, feathery white in her dark, stubby bill. Spiderwebs are primo building material for the Bushtit's nest, a pendulous, oblong construction cartoonishly large for such tiny, long-tailed birds (smaller than a kinglet).



A DFO member since 2018, **Dave Prentice** has been a birder/photographer for more than 10 years. A Colorado native, he lives in Denver and is retired from the industrial design field

Cornell's *Birds of the World* tells us why. The Bushtit is one of the first species discovered to have "helpers at the nest" — non-breeding adults generally, but sometimes older juveniles. They help with household tasks, from incubating eggs (which average six in a Bushtit clutch) to gathering nest insulation materials and brooding the hatchlings and nestlings. These "cooperative breeders" also provide another warm body or two in the nest, a Bushtit family dynamic for coping with cold.

That nest itself is a wondrous construction. Bushtit nests are so well insulated that during the two-week egg incubation period, the parents typically spend only 40% of their time on the eggs, giving them more time to forage outside.

Bushtit dwellings are also marvels of camouflage. Those I've managed to find (pure luck) in Denver City Park over the years were hidden in plain sight, tucked high in outer branches of spruce or pine. Picture a longish gourd, covered with plant material from surrounding trees, interwoven with spiderwebs. To me they look like cylindrical globs of dryer lint. In his 2019 book *How to Know the Birds*, Colorado bird expert **Ted Floyd** recalled someone else's description: "a basketball player's dirty tube sock hanging from a tree."

Once the young fledge, everyone abandons the nest, but not the communal sharing of warmth. On a spring cold-snap morning several years ago, I found a Bushtit family in City Park's "Pinetum" conifer grove. As the parents flew back and forth bringing food to their brood, the six fledglings huddled in a tight, shoulder-to-shoulder line on an interior juniper branch. Cutest survival strategy ever.

Gray and drab at a glance, Bushtits are mesmerizing to watch. Roaming in flocks (before and after having two broods a season), they flashmob through the trees, gleaning tiny insects and spiders nonstop. Hard to photograph but delightful to watch.

And to think: Bushtits were rather rare hereabouts until a decade or so ago. "Part of the reason is likely the warming and drying of climate," Floyd wrote in a 2020 [American Birding Association blog](#). He suggests they're among several Southwest species "spreading steadily northward in the past couple of decades."

To which I can only add: Lucky us!

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of The Lark Bunting since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he joined DFO in 2014, became a field trip leader in 2016, and leads occasional trips in Denver City Park and other local destinations,



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
Bushtit: Short-named, tiny-bodied builder of big, extended-family nests
- 5 From the President**
Wild Bird 9-1-1: After two unsettling incidents, I'm preparing now for a smoother next time
- 9 DFO News Notes**
- 11 Spring Program Previews**
- 12 DFO Hawk Watch**
Dinosaur Ridge raptor count underway in busy spring for Hawk Watch events
- 15 Research, Education, Conservation**
Species science, bird nutrition, youth binocs: 2025 DFO grants invest with record funding
- 18 DFO @ 90, Part 2**
"Bill Bailey" and the raven keeper: Eminent scientists took young birding club under their wing
- 33 The Lives of Birds**
Hummingbirds love our flowers — and we love what they do for our gardens

The Lark Bunting, formerly the monthly newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists, is the club's quarterly journal and is published online in January, April, July and October.

DFO On the Wing, the club's digital newsletter, is emailed monthly to all members.

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Submit time-sensitive, month-to-month news items, tips, announcements, photos and other materials to the monthly newsletter's editor at comm@dfobirds.org.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.



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**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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committee chairs,
and other position holders
directly, please contact them
individually via the
[DFO Leadership Page](#).



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Wild Bird 9-1-1: After two unsettling incidents, I'm preparing now for a smoother next time

Sharon Tinianow

I was birding in Denver's Washington Park one morning at the end of January when I spotted a raptor — on the ground. About 10 people were gathering around it, but giving it room, maybe 10 feet or so away. As I got closer, I could see it was a Red-tailed Hawk. Perhaps the binoculars around my neck gave me extra birder credibility, because when I arrived, the bystanders asked me what kind of bird it was — and was it OK?

The hawk looked fine to me, but hawks normally don't linger on the ground in an urban park where lots of people and dogs walk by. I knew not get too close. A puncture wound from one of those talons would *not* be fun. I opened my phone and called two DFO raptor experts whose numbers are in my contacts.

First to answer was **Janet Peters**, our club's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch champion. She quickly walked me through a visual assessment: No drooping wings? Clear eyes? She suggested I try to flush the bird off the ground and out of harm's way simply by walking slowly toward it.

The hawk's plumage indicated it was an immature bird. Perhaps it just lacked good judgment in a situation like this? As I slowly approached, I heard back from **Courtney Rella**, DFO's Conservation Committee chair. She also volunteers with the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program in Fort Collins, which rehabs, researches and teaches about birds of prey. She suggested I call [Rocky Mountain Wildlife Alliance](#) in Sedalia for advice. I did, and I left them a message.

About then, a Denver Parks & Recreation ranger showed up. After he phoned [Denver Animal Protection](#) (also known as Animal Control), he told everyone at the scene that there was no need to be concerned. He said Animal Protection advised that if the bird was not "actively dying," just let nature take its course. At that point, the hawk ruffled its feathers a few times and flew up onto a low branch in a nearby tree, and the bystanders dispersed. That didn't mean the hawk was OK, but at least it was out of immediate danger from people or dogs. (Unfortunately, that's one of the challenges if a bird has avian influenza. Even symptomatic birds may suddenly appear normal if they take flight.)

Later that same week, one of my neighbors called to say a Canada Goose was in the yard of the neighbor between our two houses, and it did not look good. "Could you take a look?" she asked, knowing of my birding obsession. (Not that I'd ever claimed to be a wildlife vet.) But the yard with the goose was the domain of two large dogs, and the homeowners were out of town. She was afraid that if the pet sitter came by to let the dogs out, the unfortunate goose would become prey.

I took a look and agreed. The goose — actually a Cackling Goose — seemed unable to stand and had trouble holding its head up. I was able to approach from behind, pick up the bird and carry it outside the fenced yard to my side so the dogs couldn't get at it.

And then it dawned on me: Avian flu! I quickly went inside, washed my hands thoroughly and called [Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center](#). I had visited there not long ago with **Jill Boice**, DFO's Grants Committee chair, and I remembered that they work with a lot of bird species besides other wildlife. This time I reached a real person, who suggested I phone Denver's Animal Control. She also gave me advice how to get past Animal Control's automated phone system to speak directly to someone or to at least leave a message in the right place.



Red-tailed Hawk
John Breitsch

Continued on page 6

I looked out my window from time to time to check on the goose. It was just where I'd left it, still unable to walk or fly. I think Animal Control came by when I wasn't looking, because the next time I did, the poor bird was gone. I assume the goose had to be euthanized if it didn't die first.

Two experiences in the same week made me realize I'm really not very prepared for dealing with a wildlife emergency. Something tells me I'm not the only one. After doing some internet research, here are a few organizations whose numbers and websites you might want to keep close by (or in your cellphone contact list) in case you come across a sick or injured bird.

Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation and Rocky Mountain Wildlife Alliance (clickable links above) offer good advice about what to do and not to do in a wildlife emergency. Check out these resources, including nonprofit organizations and programs that rely on public donations to function:

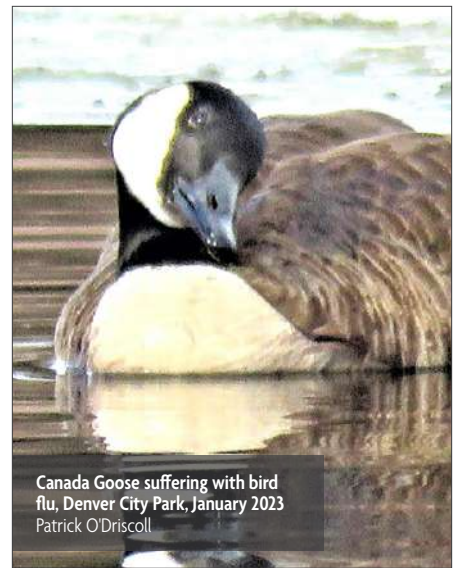
- [Rocky Mountain Raptor Program](#) in Fort Collins deals specifically with sick or injured birds of prey. It serves the area from Longmont north into several parts of Wyoming, and it has a 24-hour rehab hotline
- [Rocky Mountain Wildlife Alliance](#) in Sedalia accepts raptors, small mammals, and songbirds, and is reachable by phone, text and social media
- [Birds of Prey Foundation](#) in Broomfield also helps with raptors. It serves Broomfield, Boulder and Adams counties and adjacent areas
- If none of those is close to you, [Animal Help Now](#) has a website and a mobile app that provide lists of local/regional agencies and organizations when you report your location and the bird or other animal you've encountered
- [Colorado Parks & Wildlife](#) has a wildlife diseases page with specific avian influenza updates, safety tips, and a link to your closest CPW office to report wildlife sick or dead from possible bird flu. It will respond in person if three or more dead waterfowl are reported from a location within a two-week period
- [Colorado Department of Agriculture's](#) avian influenza webpage includes epidemic updates and wild bird-specific advice as well as human health precautions to take around sick or dead birds. Since avian flu has been observed in mammals, people are advised not to touch sick or dead birds without proper protection and to keep pets away from them or their droppings

On that sobering but important note, good birding everyone! It's good to be vigilant when enjoying the birds around us as spring migration progresses.

Heading into my third year as your president with DFO's election in April, this will be my last *From the President* column. In our club's 90th anniversary year, I am focusing on finishing our new four-part DFO history here in *The Lark Bunting* (Part 2 is in this issue). Longtime member **Mary Geder**, a DFO Board member and chair of our Nominations Committee, will take over writing this quarterly column until a new president takes office this time next year. Look for Mary's byline in this spot in the July issue.

— **Sharon**

*DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is former editor of The Lark Bunting (2017-20). She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.*



2025 ELECTION

April? Time to vote for DFO officers, board

Mary Geder

Denver Field Ornithologists will hold the club's annual election in April for officers and board directors. As in previous recent years, balloting will be via electronic mail.

Ballots with the names of eight candidates are scheduled to go out via email to all club members by **Monday, April 14**. Online voting begins upon receipt, with ballot selections due back no later than **Saturday, April 26**. Election results will be announced two nights later, at the start of DFO's monthly evening program on **Monday, April 28 via Zoom**.

Although single candidates are standing for election to each of the officer and director positions, any DFO member can self-nominate or write in other DFO members as candidates. The four officers (president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer) serve single 1-year terms and can run for re-election year to year. This year, two current officers, President **Sharon Tinianow** and interim Vice President **Charlie Chase**, seek election. Board member **Patrick O'Driscoll**, appointed interim secretary by the board in February, seeks election to that post. DFO member **Tom Econopouly**, appointed interim co-treasurer by the board in February, seeks election with the retirement of treasurer **Kathy Holland**.

Two of four DFO director candidates are running for re-election: Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** and Nominations chair **Mary Geder**. DFO past President **Susan Blansett** and club member and field trip leader **Gary Witt** seek the board seats being vacated by O'Driscoll and retiring member **Tina Jones**. Board directors serve 3-year terms and can run for re-election term to term.

Brief biographies of the candidates follow. "Please do take the time to learn about the candidates and vote," Geder says. "It will only take a moment." She also asks members to consider club leadership and other volunteer opportunities at DFO: "Your age and birding experience are not as important as your enthusiasm and new ideas."

To explore volunteering for DFO and serving in club leadership, go to the [DFO Leadership](#) page. For answers to your questions or to comment, contact Geder at mfg5000@live.com.

The 2025 candidates include:

PRESIDENT

Sharon Tinianow

Sharon was elected DFO president in 2023 and 2024 and seeks re-election to a third term. She previously was vice president (2021-2023), editor of *The Lark Bunting* newsletter (2017-20), and a member of the Conservation Committee. She is retired from the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History and lives in Denver.

VICE-PRESIDENT

Charlie Chase

While curator of birds at Denver Museum of Natural History in the early 1980s, Charlie led field trips and taught classes for DFO and Colorado Field Ornithologists. He also chaired the state bird records committee. After 20 years in Florida and other parts of the world, he returned to teach ecological and environmental design at the University of Colorado and work on Rocky Mountain Arsenal bird studies and ecological restoration. Now retired, he volunteers in Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' bird banding, Colorado bird surveys and monitoring work at the Arsenal, and he coordinates seasonal bird counts begun by DFO more than 40 years ago.

SECRETARY

Patrick O'Driscoll

A retired newspaper journalist, Pat took up birding in his 50s and joined DFO in 2014. He became a field trip leader in 2016 and was elected three times to the DFO Board (2018-2024). He became editor of *The Lark Bunting* newsletter in late 2019 and converted it to a quarterly journal in 2025. In 2023, he received one of DFO's first two Peregrine Awards, for *Lark Bunting* innovations.

TREASURER

Tom Econopouly

Tom recently joined DFO and is a retired federal employee, most recently as a hydrologist with the US Fish & Wildlife Service, where he worked on the Platte River Recovery and Implementation Program. He has worked in recent weeks with

Continued on page 8

Holland to become familiar with DFO's books and financial practices.

BOARD DIRECTOR

Susan Blansett

Susan was DFO president (2021-23) and is the most recent past president. She has served as a board member, chair of the Nominations Committee and interim Conservation chair. She is also a trip leader. Susan spent 30 years in economic development and recently retired from the Colorado Workforce Development Council.

Mary Geder

Mary joined DFO in the early 2000s and is a field trip leader. She has also served as treasurer, field trip scheduler and Nominations Committee chair. A retired data system analyst in the oil and gas industry, Mary also worked previously as a biologist for the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

David Suddjian

David joined DFO in 2014 and became a field trip leader in 2016. In 2018 he organized and led the club's Colorado Big Year, which recorded 361 species on 230 trips, both club highs. DFO Field Trips chair since 2021, David has served on the DFO Board ever since. He has certified 40 new trip leaders and coordinates 200-300 outings a year. He has begun field trip collaborations with Aiken Audubon (Colorado Springs) and Denver Audubon. He created and presents *BIRD BOMBS*, DFO's popular bird ID series on Zoom. In 2023, he received one of DFO's first two Peregrine Awards, for field trip program innovation.

Gary Witt

A 31-year career hydrogeologist for Wright Water Engineers in Denver, Gary retired in 2021 after stints as a project manager and vice president. Soon after, Suddjian recruited him to be a DFO field trip leader. He has since led 24 DFO trips and three outings at last year's Colorado Field Ornithologists Convention in Lamar, and he'll lead two at this year's convention in Grand Junction. Gary is a member of the 400-species club in Colorado (420) and his life bird species list is nearing 1,300.

Welcome to new DFO members

Cathy and Christopher Barr, Littleton; Sally Berga and Lynn Jankovsky, Greenwood Village; Jesse and Nicole Bopp, Lakewood; Shmuel and Amy Korengut, Golden; Robert Mitchell, Arvada; Polly Reetz, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Sally Berga and Lynn Jankovsky, Karel Buckley, Jasmine Dey, Brian Johnson, Tina Jones, Roger Koester, Pam Lauman, Philip McNichols, Polly Reetz, Melissa Schlothman, Lori Sharp, Sara Slater, Holly Sollod and John Chanin, Robyn and Jeremy Winick

Friends of DFO

Sally Berga and Lynn Jankovsky, Tina Jones, Felice Lyons *in memory of John C. Breitsch*, Kevin Millard, Melissa Schlothman, Robyn and Jeremy Winick

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Jane Haddock, Tina Jones, Megan Miller, Linda Olson and Michael Serruto, Melissa Schlothman, Cheryl Wilcox, Larry Wilson, Rob and Michele Worrall



Wood Ducks, Barr Lake, 2013
John Breitsch

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

*Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.*

NEXT ON BIRD BOMBS: CONE FORESTS "HABITAT BLAST" ON APRIL 10

Register now for the next *BIRD BOMBS* webinar, "Habitat Blast: Cone Forests," scheduled for Thursday, April 10, at 7 p.m. MDT. Creator-presenter **David Suddjian** describes it as "first in a small series of episodes focused on the birds of particular Colorado habitats." The sessions will still explore bird identification, but also bird communities typical of the subject habitat, and they will highlight "important resources and features for birds in each." If you missed the most recent episode, "[ID Masters, Spring Edition](#)," the Zoom video is now available with the rest of the *BIRD BOMBS* episodes on [DFO's YouTube Channel](#) and on the [DFO webpage](#).



REGISTER FOR BIRD BOMBS

SPRING BIRDING @ CHICO BASIN STARTS APRIL 29

Birding at Chico Basin Ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties opens **Tuesday, April 29** and runs for six weeks through **Monday, June 2**. This marks the second year of severely restricted public access to the 86,000-acre ranch, a prized birding destination owned by the Colorado State Land Board,

which in 2024 unilaterally dictated narrow new seasons and visitor restrictions for spring and fall birding. (The ranch is leased for cattle ranching by a family-owned livestock operator.)

Registration is the same as last year at the website of **Aiken Audubon Society**, the Pikes Peak region chapter of National Audubon. Cost is \$15 per person, with registration up to a week in advance. Access is still limited to only 20 birders a day, and mornings only (7 a.m. to 1 p.m.). Groups of 10-12 birders can register ahead of time by emailing Aiken at chicoregistration@aikenaudubon.com with the number in the party and name/email of the group leader, who will receive instructions back for the group. Additional group members (beyond 12) can sign up individually one week ahead of the group trip date.

Also like last year, visitation is limited to just three locations: the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies banding station, the ranch Headquarters Pond, and Rose Pond. **Linda Hodges** of Aiken Audubon, which holds a birding lease at Chico Basin only to facilitate registration, reminds visitors that "any abuse of the above requirements could cause us to lose the lease." Questions? Contact Aiken at chicoregistration@aikenaudubon.com or email Hodges directly at conservation@aikenaudubon.com.

REGISTER TO BIRD AT CHICO BASIN

COLORADO'S XMAS BIRD COUNT TOTALS IN FOR 2024

Participants in 53 official National Audubon Christmas Bird Counts across Colorado in December 2024 and early January 2025 recorded 204 bird species and 790,435 total birds, according to **Brandon Percival**, regional editor for the Colorado count. In reporting the results, he noted that "the most interesting bird" of the count was a Red-breasted X Red-naped Sapsucker hybrid found in Cortez. "I don't think that hybrid combo has been found on a Colorado CBC before." In reporting the results, Percival said a full summary of the Colorado CBC season was in the works. To check for it, look for "The 125th Christmas Bird Count in Colorado" in [Percival's article page](#) on the Audubon website.

Continued on page 10



BLUFF LAKE CONSTRUCTION: NO ONSITE PARKING, STAIRS

On St. Patrick's Day, construction crews dug in at Bluff Lake Nature Center to begin an \$8.5 million "Campus Improvements Project." The popular birding destination, along Sand Creek in the Central Park neighborhood where Denver's Stapleton International Airport once stood, will still be accessible, but with [major temporary changes](#). Access is only on foot or bicycle through two new pedestrian entrances from Havana Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. From now through the expected completion late this fall, anyone driving to Bluff Lake must find street parking in the neighborhoods south and west, across the street from the nature center.

"There will be no onsite parking during construction as the entire parking lot area and the ramp/stairs down into the site will be closed" and off limits, the center announced in its March 2025 email update to friends of Bluff Lake. "We encourage anyone who is able to roll or stroll to the site." It called construction "an exciting, and, yes, potentially challenging time for Bluff Lake, including its team and visitors."

The new entrances includes a permanent pedestrian access point above Bluff Lake's far northwest end, where the crosswalk at Florence Way crosses Havana Street. That area will also serve as the center's temporary headquarters during construction. The second new "Southwest" pedestrian entrance is temporary. It crosses Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard where the street begins to bend from west to north, about 1,500 feet west of the now-closed main entrance to Bluff Lake. Further details, including a map of the changes, are on the Bluff Lake website's "[Construction Site Access](#)" page.

2025'S GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT: 8,127 SPECIES

[The Great Backyard Bird Count](#), a partnership among the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon, and Birds Canada, set a new high mark in species recorded during its Feb. 14-17 run. Worldwide, 8,127 bird species were checklisted by hundreds of thousands of birders during the four-day observance. That count (which is still being updated) totals 207 more species than during the 2024 count.

The backyard count was launched by Cornell and Audubon in 1998 as the first online community science project to collect data on wild birds and display results in near real time. Birds Canada's participation in 2009 increased the turnout, and the project became global in 2013 when the data was first entered into the eBird database, which itself is the world's largest biodiversity-related community science effort.

Not surprisingly, US birders filed the most Backyard Bird Count checklists on eBird, with more than 200,000 lists recording 670 species. Submissions via Merlin soared to more than 435,000, up 100% from 2024. India and Canada were a distant second and third among the 217 countries or eBird subregions where birders participated. Go to the count's [2025 final results](#) webpage for full details. For even more updated figures and drill-down details, visit the backyard count's [eBird page](#).

AUDUBON'S STATE OF BIRDS 2025: SHARP DECLINE

The [2025 US State of the Birds](#) report, produced by National Audubon and a coalition of conservation and science groups, shows continued widespread declines in American bird populations across all habitats, both mainland and marine. It notes that 229 species require "urgent conservation action." To no surprise, the worst losses were listed among grassland birds, whose numbers have plummeted by 43% since 1970. Forest birds also were hard hit. Waterfowl, which had seen improvement, now show steep declines since 2022. The report follows five years after the blockbuster 2019 report in the journal *Science* — known colloquially as the "[Nearly 3 Billion Birds Gone](#)" study — that documented the many North American birds lost over the half-century.

[DOWNLOAD FULL REPORT \(PDF\)](#)

SPRING PROGRAM PREVIEW

Research, Education & Conservation in Action: 2024 DFO Grantees Report



Holden Fox
CSU



William Churchill Anderson
CU Boulder



Dr. Alison Hazel
Harmony Veterinary Center



Emily Braker
CU Museum of Natural History

Holden Fox, William Churchill Anderson, Alison Hazel
Monday, April 28, 2025
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

The last installment in the 2025 winter-spring series of DFO monthly Zoom programs is “Research, Education & Conservation in Action,” a kind of show-and-tell session with recipients of last year’s grants from the Denver Field Ornithologists’ [Research, Education and Conservation Fund](#).

Three of the six 2024 grantees will present updates on their research and conservation work. All winners of these annual grants agree to report back to the DFO membership in one of three ways: An article in *The Lark Bunting*, a DFO field trip planned around the theme and field location of the research, or an oral presentation at the April membership meeting.

In addition, this final evening program before DFO’s summer break will include a bonus presentation by **Emily Braker**, vertebrate zoology collections manager at the University of Colorado Boulder Museum of Natural History. Her PowerPoint talk will feature images from the school’s extensive ornithology collection.

Two of the grantee presenters for the April 28 meeting are conducting research on common bird species in Colorado. **Holden Fox**, now a doctoral student at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, will discuss his grant-winning project, “Conservation Genomics of Loggerhead Shrike.” In applying for his \$1,850 grant, Fox noted “persistent and widespread declines” among grassland birds. He proposed to conduct “a comprehensive genetic analysis” of migratory patterns for the Loggerhead, “a grassland species of conservation concern.” He intended to create a map of “range-wide genetic variation” for use in targeted management and conservation strategies for the species.

Another doctoral student, **William Churchill Anderson** in the University of Colorado Boulder’s Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, will report on his work with House Wrens, titled, “Continued Exploration of a Novel Avian Hybrid Zone.” Anderson and his colleagues had previously learned that the two subspecies of House Wren found in the US — thought to be more widely separated in the East and West — are in fact occurring together here in Colorado. This means the hybrid zone where the two subspecies meet is significantly farther west than previously thought. Anderson’s \$2,000 grant research in 2024 continued his work to more precisely map the transition zone between subspecies along the Front Range of the Rockies.

The third grant recipient to report is [Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center](#) in Longmont. On behalf of Greenwood, veterinarian **Dr. Alison Hazel**, a center volunteer and former avian clinic supervisor, will discuss “Wildlife Rehabilitation: the Big Picture.” Greenwood Wildlife received \$2,000 to purchase specialized food and medical supplies “vital for the healthy development of young wildlife and the recovery of adults from injuries and illness.” Orphaned young require “species-specific formulas from specialty retailers,” the center said in its grant application. “Recuperating adults often require specialized foods such as live fish, crickets, waxworms, and fruit flies” not readily available from general public supply sources.

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO's January, February and March programs

DFO keeps a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring programs. If you could not attend our first three programs of 2025 live via Zoom, click the "WATCH ONLINE" link below each title to view the program recording on [DFO's YouTube channel](#) — or go to the DFO website's "[Past Programs](#)" page to view.

JANUARY 27

No Boundaries for Wildlife: Saving Tropical Birds in Colorado

Nic Korte
Wildlife conservationist, author
(*Ten Jungle Days*)

WATCH ONLINE

FEBRUARY 24

Colorado: We Need to Talk About Ravens

Nathan Pieplow
Birdsong expert, author
(*Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds*)

WATCH ONLINE

MARCH 24

Mountain Plover Ecology and Conservation in North America

Angela Dwyer
Bird Conservancy of the Rockies,
program manager, northern
Great Plains

WATCH ONLINE

DFO HAWK WATCH

Dinosaur Ridge raptor count underway in busy spring for Hawk Watch events

Patrick O'Driscoll

Hawk Watch counters and volunteers are about midway through DFO's annual spring-migration count of birds of prey atop Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County. As of April 3, 621 hawks, eagles, falcons and other raptors had been tallied this season by the [Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch](#) teams of ridgetop counters and volunteers.

The daily raptor count, which began March 1 and runs through May 10, followed an orientation session in late winter for new volunteers. This year's count also comes after an overwinter presentation about the Dinosaur Ridge operation to a Colorado Field Ornithologists audience via Zoom, and the start of a joint DFO-Nature's Educators program to familiarize Jefferson County schoolchildren with birds of prey. And coming up April 12 is Hawk Watch's annual Raptorthon fundraiser.

Lead counter **Emma Riley**, back for her fourth season on Dinosaur Ridge, said the first raptor tallied on a quiet (three birds) opening day March 1 was an uncommon one: Rough-legged Hawk, "a very exciting start to the count and the first Rough-legged recorded on the ridge in the past two years."

The counting site west of Denver sits atop an iconic segment of the Dakota Hogback geological formation, along the Front Range of the Rockies between Golden and Morrison. "Migration is picking up every day," said Riley, "and we look forward to the return of a few species we have yet to see: Osprey, Swainson's Hawk, and Broad-Winged Hawk." Overall, she added, "we expect to see about 2,000 more raptors between now and May 10."

The count on March 20 was the best day thus far, with 68 migrant raptors of seven different species. The day's "showstopper" was a noon-hour flyby of 41 Red-tailed Hawks, most of them in a low flight line directly over the ridge. Four days later, a whopping 59 Red-tails passed over the ridge March 24, 56 of them during a two-hour period. "The last time we saw a Red-tailed Hawk flight like this was in 2019!" the Hawk Watch team reported on its [Facebook page](#).

One day after that, the March 25 count registered a one-day high for the year of 71 raptors, including an "amazing" surge of 32 American Kestrels after only two had been recorded previously.

Birds weren't the only surge that day: With balmy weather, 33 human visitors climbed to the ridge on March 25, "with many people curious about the count," the team reported.

Continued on page 13

Raptorthon fundraiser April 12

Coming up soon is Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch's annual "Raptorthon" fundraiser, set this year for **Saturday, April 12** (rain date April 13). DFO's team, The Mile High Raptors, seeks to earn pledge donations by recording as many bird species as possible (both raptors and other birds) in a 24-hour period. The eight-member team on the ridge will be assisted by volunteer birders counting species down below within an 8-mile radius birding circle centered on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO's is one of five Raptorthon teams that represent hawk-watching stations across the country. All are affiliated with the [Hawk Migration Association](#), with which they work in tandem to collect and distribute essential migration data from seasonal raptor counts.

Please consider donating to help keep Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch running each year. To participate in the birding circle, see the circle map on the [Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch](#) website. Participants are encouraged to file eBird checklists from their birding counts within the circle on April 12, and then share the checklists using the "share" feature on eBird with the DFO hawk watchers' eBird account, "dinoridgehawkwatch." **Donations can be made through May 31.**

DONATE TO THE MILE HIGH RAPTORS

Hawk Watch training / orientation

The prelude to the 2025 Hawk Watch season included a well-attended online training Feb. 19 and in-person orientation Feb. 22 on Dinosaur Ridge. Volunteer education coordinator and former DFO president **Dave Hill** led the "basic training" via Zoom for 67 prospective observers. A veteran hawk watcher, Hill went through basic details about how to become Dinosaur Ridge observers as well as the fundamentals of in-flight raptor identification. Interest in the hawk count was so strong, with 40 new and returning volunteers, that they were split into two ridgetop orientation sessions led by Hill and lead counter Riley.

Continued on page 14



Lead counter Emma Riley, center, scans sky during Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch orientation
Natalie Uschner-Arroyo



Hawk Watch-Nature's Educators joint program at Westlake Elementary in Lakewood
Audrey Anderson



Trainer Dave Hill leads orientation for volunteer hawk watchers on Dinosaur Ridge
Natalie Uschner-Arroyo

JeffCo schools raptor program

Thanks to a grant from the Jefferson County Open Space Foundation, DFO's Hawk Watch team will familiarize more than 1,000 students in three JeffCo schools with birds of prey this spring in collaboration with [Nature's Educators](#), the traveling Colorado wildlife education program that exhibits live raptors and other wildlife.

"Our goal is to introduce students to what raptors are and their importance," said **Natalie Uschner-Arroyo**, DFO Hawk Watch chair and program manager. "We want to teach them a little about migration, let them recognize that they can see these majestic birds in their own area, and even visit a close-by site where biologists monitor these raptors in migration" — Dinosaur Ridge.

Janet Peters, Hawk Watch youth education coordinator, organized the first presentation March 3 at Westgate Elementary in Lakewood. Hawk Watch counter **Audrey Anderson** gave a short presentation about the Dinosaur Ridge count, after which Nature's Educators brought out live hawks and other birds of prey. Bear Creek K-8 and Welchester Elementary, both in Lakewood, will have their raptor sessions in May (Bear Creek on May 15 and Welchester on May 16). The team also distributes handouts created by the Hawk Watch Committee that complement the school program. They include activity worksheets and trading card-sized guides with raptor fun facts and directions on how to visit the Dinosaur Ridge site.

Outreach: CFO, Evergreen Audubon, social media, new logo

In late January, Riley gave an hour-long presentation in Colorado Field Ornithologists' Dead of Winter Knowledge Quest speaker series. Her engaging and informative talk on Jan. 30 via Zoom covered the history of raptor conservation, species specifics and population trends, the history of hawk migration watches, and highlights of the past three seasons of DFO's hawk counts at Dinosaur Ridge.

WATCH RILEY'S PRESENTATION

Also scheduled in early April for Evergreen Audubon's monthly in-person chapter meeting was counter Anderson's talk, "Hawk Migration Along the Rocky Mountain Flyway: The Importance of Community Science Projects."

In addition, Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch has set up new social media pages. Visit them on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

The raptor-counting program also has a new-look website and a nifty new logo. The [online site](#) includes various links to the main DFO webpages. The colorful logo, designed by Hawk Watch volunteer coordinator **Pam Moore**, features a Red-tailed Hawk against a stylized backdrop of forest, mountain and sky.



Species science, bird nutrition, youth binocs: 2025 DFO grants invest with record funding

Jill Boice

Thanks to the generosity of our members, applicants for grants from Denver Field Ornithologists' Research, Education & Conservation Fund are receiving a combined \$11,327 in financial aid in 2025, a new record.

This year's nine winning bird-related projects — from equipping a school bird club with binoculars and improving nutrition for rehabilitation of injured wildlife to species-specific scientific research and birdlife awareness along a creekside Denver trail — also represent the most applicants to receive grants in a single year.

DFO has awarded grants periodically since 1994, when **Mary Hope Robinson** donated \$15,000 to establish the DFO Educational Endowment Fund. In 2012, the grants program name was changed to the DFO Research, Education, and Conservation Fund, and we have funded projects grants annually ever since.

This year the club received 12 very interesting applications. The DFO Grants Committee evaluated them based on how well they matched our goal to “encourage the study, appreciation and preservation both of birds and their habitats.” The DFO Board of Directors approved the 2025 awards at its February meeting. In addition to funding student research, grants also represent new opportunities for DFO outreach and partnerships with other non-profit organizations and programs.

The grantees are expected to report back to DFO next year on their projects' status. These can take the form of an oral presentation at the club's annual general meeting in April, a written article in DFO's quarterly journal, *The Lark Bunting*, or a field trip-style outing (where practical) to a location of a project's field research work.

Here are summaries of the winning projects and grant amounts:



Young birder on Sand Creek Greenway

Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership, Denver

Community Bird Awareness Programs (\$990)

The Sand Creek Regional Greenway is a 13-mile public trail and natural area in the stream corridor across northeast metro Denver. The nonprofit [Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership](#) was established to protect, maintain and enhance the greenway. Members organize community cleanups, wellness programs and community science experiences. The partnership's grant application sought money to further develop bird awareness programs along the greenway. It also plans to use some of the funds to buy binoculars and field guides, and pay for transportation and translators as needed.

(** In a new DFO effort, the club has agreed to provide DFO volunteers to the greenway group to help with community programs, including bird and naturalist walks and cleanup days. Interested DFO members can visit the [Greenway Partnership's website](#) or email DFO Grants chair Jill Boice at jill@booksandcats.net.)

Continued on page 16



Cristina Barros with a Red-winged Blackbird

Cristina Barros, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley

Song Function of Female Birds Using Red-Winged Blackbirds as a Model (\$1,560)

A doctoral candidate in biology, **Cristina Barros** is studying the role of female birdsong, a behavior present in about two-thirds of songbird species. She believes this characteristic has been overlooked in bird studies and counts. Her research studies five functions of female birdsong. She will use nest monitoring techniques to correlate song use to reproductive success. During field work this summer, she will perform research demonstrations for visiting youth groups. Barros also intends to publish her work in both English and Spanish.

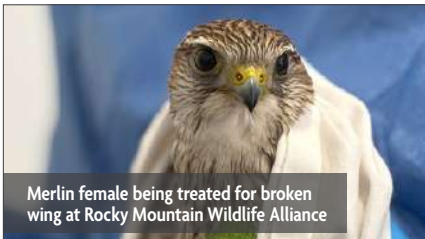


Sara Padula with Mountain Chickadee

Sara Padula, University of Colorado Boulder

Genetic Adaptations for Spatial Cognition in Chickadees Using Elevation Contrasts (\$2,000)

Tiny but tough, chickadees survive cold winters by storing food and using their impressive memory to find it later. But how do their brains adapt to that challenge? Researcher **Sara Padula**, a third-year doctoral student in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, is investigating the genetic basis of spatial memory in Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees, two species that live at different elevations in the Front Range landscape where UC Boulder's Taylor Lab has conducted its long-running [Boulder Chickadee Study](#). By comparing the genetic variation of birds from high and low elevations, Padula's study aims to uncover genetic adaptations that allow the birds to evolve such impressive memories and, thus, survive harsh winters. Understanding these genetic traits could also provide insights into how animals adapt to climate change and extreme environments.



Merlin female being treated for broken wing at Rocky Mountain Wildlife Alliance

Rocky Mountain Wildlife Alliance, Sedalia

Safeguarding Raptors Through Reliable Nutrition (\$500)

Rocky Mountain Wildlife Alliance in Sedalia operates a variety of programs to foster the relationship between people and nature. Its key program is a wildlife hospital and rehabilitation center, where DFO's grant will go toward the purchase of quality food for raptors.



Nate Carley beside a chickadee nestbox

Nate Carley, University of Colorado Boulder

Does Ambient Temperature Influence Incubation Behavior In Front Range Chickadees? (\$1,281)

Incubation is critical to the successful hatching of all birds, yet its intricacies are difficult to observe in the field, especially among cavity nesters. **Nate Carley**, an undergraduate student in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, will use remote-sensing "iButtons" to collect ambient and incubation temperatures of Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees. Understanding how temperatures affect the species will provide data which may guide how to support species in rapidly changing climates.

Continued on page 17



Denver South High School Bird Club

Binoculars For Club Outings (\$1,436)

DFO field trip leader **Nate Bond**, a chemistry teacher at [Denver South High School](#), applied for a grant to equip the school's birding club with binoculars. [Vortex Optics](#), the American maker of quality optics for wildlife watching and hunting, has agreed to provide some of the binoculars at modest cost and donate others.



Samantha Kruczek, University of Colorado Boulder

Characterization and Spatial Analysis of Avian Pox Virus in two Chickadee Species across an Elevational Gradient in the Colorado Front Range (\$1,900)

With a lifelong interest in nature, undergraduate student **Sam Kruczek** grew up learning to catch and identify dragonflies and salamanders at summer nature camps. Since starting college, her interest has turned to studying the threats that animals face. This project focuses on the avian pox virus in Black-capped and Mountain chickadees. How does it affect the birds' health? What strain is infecting them? How do infection patterns vary across elevation? Understanding the answers could inform conservation efforts for Colorado's two chickadee species. Kruczek plans further exploration of wildlife health and conservation in her academic and professional careers.



Nicholas Frasson, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Does Migratory Distance Affect Reproductive Success Of A Passerine Bird? (\$1,160)

Nico Frasson, a fourth-year French doctoral student in Evolution, Ecology and Organismal Biology, focuses on physiological tradeoffs between long-distance migration and reproductive strategies. His subjects are a population of Lincoln's Sparrows that breeds at Molas Pass, CO, elevation approximately 11,000 feet. Camping there for six weeks each summer, Frasson and undergraduate students band and measure the birds and sample and record their songs. They also search for the sparrows' nests to measure the nestlings. Also of interest is where his summer sparrows spend winter and how that migration distance (an important energy cost) may affect reproductive success.



Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Longmont

Species-specific Food and Medical Supplies (\$500)

Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center near Longmont is a wildlife treatment and rehabilitation facility for both mammals and birds. The grant funds will assist in the purchase of species-specific foods and medical supplies for the center's wild patients.

Jill Boice, who joined DFO in 2001, chairs the club's Grants Committee and leads occasional slow field trips. She is also a volunteer raptor monitor at Cherry Creek State Park

Continued on page 18

“Bill Bailey” and the raven keeper: Eminent scientists took young birding club under their wing

Editor's note: This month, Denver Field Ornithologists celebrates 90 years as a birding club. To mark this milestone, DFO is researching and drafting DFO @ 90, a fresh history of our club in four parts. Beginning in January with Part 1, four chronological chapters are appearing quarterly through 2025 in The Lark Bunting. Part 2 follows. Parts 3 and 4 will appear in the journal's July and October issues.

Sharon Tinianow

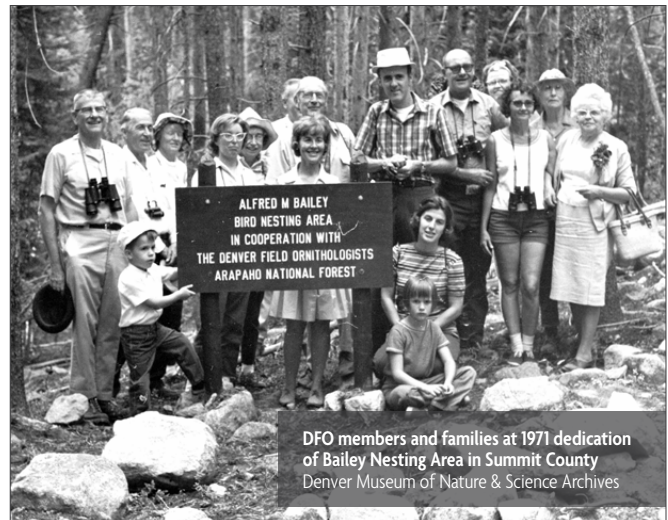
Half a century ago, cheerful chitchat and a smattering of applause broke the Saturday stillness in a wild, remote corner of Arapaho National Forest outside Silverthorne, CO. It was July 17, 1971, and a small group of Denver birders and their families had journeyed 70 miles west into Summit County. The last two miles led up a winding dirt track to the Rock Creek Trailhead, elevation 9,500 feet.

Amidst pine and spruce woods, the group from Denver Field Ornithologists gathered around a new, double-posted wooden sign to dedicate the [Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area](#). **Alfred M. Bailey** himself, an internationally known ornithologist, was present that day. He had recently retired as director of the Denver Museum of Natural History (now Denver Museum of Nature & Science). The decision to name the area after him acknowledged not only Bailey's extensive ornithology work there, but also his years of support for DFO from its Depression-era beginnings as the Colorado Bird Club.

Our club worked for years with the US Forest Service to set aside this 5,000-acre tract below the southern spine of the Gore Range as a special management area. No timber cutting, heavy grazing or development of new mining claims would be allowed there again. Tucked between the Gore Range Trail

and Eagles Nest Primitive Area (now Eagles Nest Wilderness), the Bailey area protects vital and diverse habitat — stands of spruce, aspen and lodgepole pine, and extensive willow thickets, bogs and grass meadows along North Rock Creek. As its name indicates, it was and is an avian maternity ward for dozens of nesting species, from Red-naped Sapsucker, Steller's Jay and Mountain Chickadee to Western Flycatcher, Violet-Green Swallow and Lincoln's Sparrow.

Bailey even took some of the species photographs there for *Birds of Colorado*, the landmark historical reference work he co-wrote with his museum colleague and fellow ornithologist **Robert J. Niedrach**. The birding club, credited on the official Forest Service sign for its role in preserving the area, conducted overnight field trips there for a number of years. Every summer, DFO still returns to lead a field trip survey of the nesting area's abundant birdlife (more than 100 eBird species recorded).



DFO members and families at 1971 dedication of Bailey Nesting Area in Summit County
Denver Museum of Nature & Science Archives

Good friends, good humor

Bailey and Niedrach, colleagues and co-authors of Colorado's bird bible, became great personal friends as well. Both were devoted to field work and to public education. Each traveled extensively to document birds in locations across the globe. Besides *Birds of Colorado* (1965), they wrote several other publications together. Beyond their serious pursuit of ornithology, they shared a sense of humor and joyful camaraderie. Bailey good-naturedly accepted being called “**Bill**,” after the popular, turn-of-the-century music hall anthem “(Won't You Come Home) Bill Bailey.” Niedrach, who had a habit of adopting wild animals, was nevermore without his pet raven, **Dick**.

Continued on page 19

About DFO @ 90

DFO @ 90 is a four-part historical narrative to mark this year's 90th birthday of Denver Field Ornithologists. The project team includes club president **Sharon Tinianow**, *The Lark Bunting* journal editor **Patrick O'Driscoll**, and club historian **Kris Haglund**, with assistance from other members and supporters.

Sources for our research include materials in the club archives at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. The Colorado Bird Club (renamed DFO in 1964) held its meetings there for the first 29 years of the club's existence, when DMNS was the Colorado Museum of Natural History. As DFO, the club continued to meet in the museum through 2018.

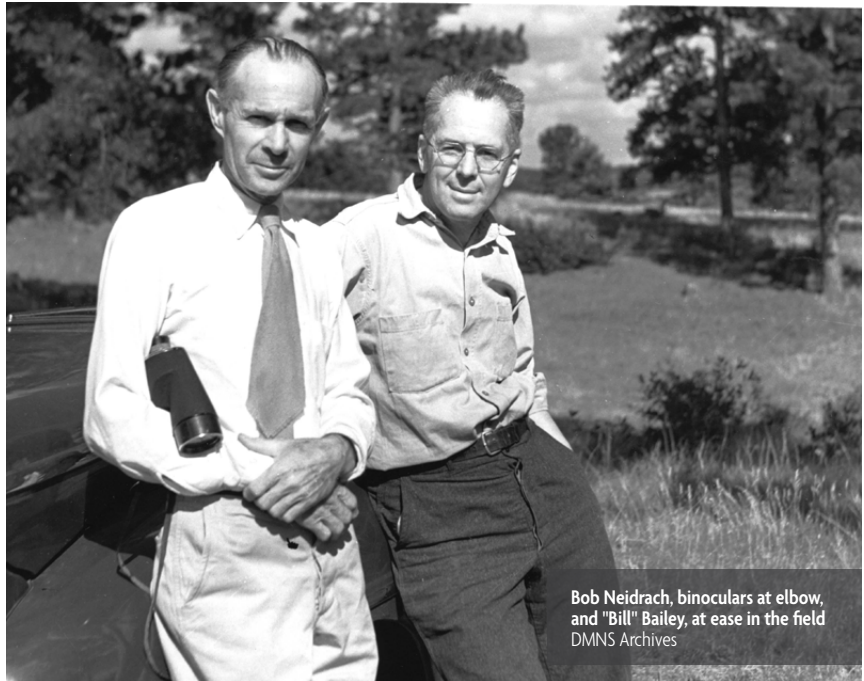
Thanks to the DMNS Archives Department, led by **Laura Uglean-Jackson**, for its generous time, expert curation of DFO's records and invaluable assistance in our research.

The DFO archive also contains scrapbooks, photos and memorabilia kept through the years by history-minded charter members of the club, including co-founder **Margaret Pritchett** and **Ruth Wheeler**. The team also relied on a previous DFO history written in 2002-03 by club historian, former president and Ptarmigan awardee **Warren I. Finch** (1924-2014).

Tinianow is chief writer of *DFO @ 90*. O'Driscoll edits, revises and augments with additional team research. Thanks also to club members who responded to our request for their own DFO-related memories and accounts.

The *DFO @ 90* team appeals again for more member accounts, documents and photos. Please share your memories and mementos to make this history as complete and accurate as possible. Contact Tinianow at sharontinianow@gmail.com and O'Driscoll at patodrisk@gmail.com.

DFO @ 90 cont from page 18



Bob Neidrach, binoculars at elbow, and "Bill" Bailey, at ease in the field
DMNS Archives

Individually and together, Bailey and Niedrach left an indelible imprint on our birding club. As a teacher, Niedrach inspired DFO's founders to organize the Colorado Bird Club in 1935, and he helped guide their new venture through the Great Depression and World War II. Both men were frequent presenters at the club's monthly program meetings, and Bailey continued to present occasionally through the 1960s. The club honored both with lifetime DFO memberships.

As the Colorado Bird Club passed its 20th anniversary in the 1950s, its relationship with the museum deepened. The growing institution in Denver City Park was host to club meetings eight months of the year. The president of the board presided over the business part of the meeting, including reading aloud the minutes of the previous meeting. The vice president, responsible for planning each month's program, introduced the featured speaker. Attendance ranged as high as 65 members and guests, and sometimes dipped to as few as 16 on bad-weather nights.

As museum director, Bailey formally invited the club in 1959 to make the museum its official address and use the museum's phone number in contact listings. Bailey also advised the board of directors on various administrative issues. The bird club's close bond with both Bailey and Niedrach secured meeting space for the club there for several decades.

Close relations continued under **Donald Thatcher**, the museum's curator emeritus, who volunteered on club committees and served on the board of directors. He would serve later as DFO president himself (1970-71). Club members were regular volunteers at the museum, helping Thatcher renovate the museum's Bird Room in 1979. That year, former DFO president **Patty Echelmeyer** (1968-70) served as the museum's volunteer coordinator. Bird club members groomed and dusted bird specimens, even repainting the feet of some and replacing glass eyeballs in others.

Continued on page 20

Birding on the rise

In the years after the Colorado Bird Club was born, similar clubs began to form in cities across the country. Chapters of the National Audubon Society, which began in New York City, were fledging in more and more states. But birding really took off as a leisure activity in the 1950s and 1960s. Prosperity surged in the '50s for many Americans (particularly white ones). With the end of wartime gas rationing and rubber shortages, car ownership was within reach, and people had more non-work free time. The comfort and safety of the nation's roadways grew dramatically just as more local, state, and federal parks and recreational sites were being created.

The freedom to travel easily to natural areas where birdlife flourished coincided with better gear as well. Before the war, a good pair of binoculars (usually European-made) was too expensive for most. The only affordable alternative was a low-magnification pair of opera glasses — better than nothing but of little use in identifying species beyond the backyard. Post-war, the market was flooded with military surplus binoculars that put quality optics in the hands of far more outdoor enthusiasts, from hunters and hikers to the swelling ranks of “birdwatchers.” (They would come to be known as “birders” only after a 1969 glossary in *Birding* magazine defined that word for people who “seriously” pursue “the hobby of birding.”)

In the decade after the war, new illustrated field guides filled the market, too. The iconic and portable Peterson Guides pioneered by American naturalist **Roger Tory Peterson** in 1934 (the year before our club was formed) were still popular. But guides proliferated further with multiple options according to geography, bird types and species families, even some organized by bird size and plumage color. “Field guides make the natural world knowable,” naturalist-author **Scott Weidensaul** later wrote. “They are the first entry point for most people into the diversity of life on the planet.” In his book *Of A Feather: A Brief History of American Birding*, Weidensaul notes that being able to attach a name to something is the first step toward appreciation.



Club birders on July 1951 field trip
to Evans Ranch west of Evergreen
DMNS Archives

Continued on page 21

As the ranks of birders grew in the '60s and '70s, so did the Colorado Bird Club, now called DFO. Membership rose from 100 in 1959 to 245 in 1978. The original club's "year book" annuals and monthly postcard notices for meetings and field trips were replaced in 1953 by a monthly newsletter. Typewritten, mimeographed and mailed to all members, [*Colorado Bird Notes*](#) included field trip reports listing species and bird numbers seen, club member news, a calendar of meetings and field trips, and advice for birders. (There were no photos, of course.) The very first issue delivered this advice:

Keep a bird list for each trip. Get into the habit of checking off every bird you see. Still better, keep count of the numbers seen and the number of times a species is seen, together with the locality, habitat, weather and total time you spent looking. Every birder should have a LIFE list, a YEAR'S list and a TRIP list. At the end of the year, we'll publish the number of species everyone gets on his year's list.

(That last commitment, it should be noted, was not kept!)

More field trips . . . and a new club name

Field trips were conducted in every month of the year. Red Rocks Park, Genesee Mountain Park and Barr Lake were favorite destinations, with at least one trip and sometimes more a month. As the years passed, the number of destinations expanded to include Pawnee National Grasslands, Rocky Mountain National Park, the San Luis Valley and Pueblo, among others, in addition to closer-in destinations like Bear Creek, Castlewood Canyon and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal. Field trips were almost always on Saturday and Sunday with the occasional overnight or weekday trip. A cadre of field trip leaders tended to lead one trip a month to a site they knew well. A meetup location was designated so that carpools could form, and members were urged to reimburse the driver for gas money.

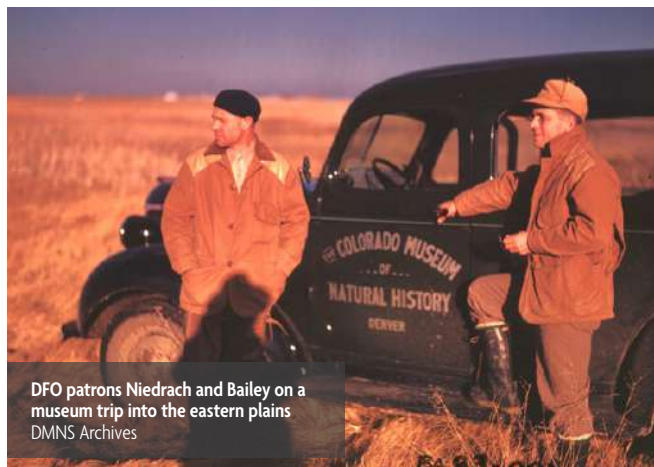
An important milestone in DFO's history coincided with events that led to the club's name change. In response to growing demand in Colorado beyond Denver, a committee led by **Lois Webster** planned the first statewide convention of Colorado birding enthusiasts. More than 100 people attended, and collectively they recorded 128 species of birds in two days of group outings. The Denver convention's success led to the

formation in 1965 of our first statewide bird organization, Colorado Field Ornithologists. To avoid the confusion of two birding organizations with "Colorado" in the name, our Colorado Bird Club changed its name in 1964 to Denver Field Ornithologists.

The change of name also reflected a philosophical realignment of focus. Calling ourselves "field ornithologists" suggested a more systematic and scientific approach to studying (and enjoying) birds in the wild. The previous "bird club" harkened back to a more old-fashioned era, when women of means formed associations to accomplish good works.

By the 1960s, more and more birders were keeping life lists of species they'd seen. Local, state and national parks even began printing bird lists to hand out to visitors. National Audubon's Christmas Bird Count, founded at the turn of the 20th century, was a well-established tradition that DFO members had participated in since the club's founding. Other counts were springing up, too, including annual DFO-organized [*spring and fall counts*](#) in several Denver area locations beginning in 1979. Since then, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology launched the Great Backyard Bird Count in 1998, one of the largest global community science efforts of its kind.

The Denver-area spring and fall counts were created through DFO by a group of birders that included today's dean of Colorado birding, **Hugh Kingery**. He had joined the Colorado Bird Club as a young man in 1953, was involved in the transition that created CFO, and later served as DFO president (1987-89). After the spring and fall counts got going, Kingery coordinated them for decades into the 2020s (though they were canceled in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic).



DFO patrons Niedrach and Bailey on a museum trip into the eastern plains
DMNS Archives

Continued on page 22

Bird Notes: How newsletter changed names

From time to time, the editor of *Colorado Bird Notes* begged readers for interesting articles to publish (an editor plea that continues to this day) and for trip leaders to submit their checklists in time for publication. One member who consistently answered that call was **Howard Rollin**, a self-taught northeastern Colorado artist and diligent observer of birdlife in his area. Rollin lived in the town where he grew up, Weldona, near Fort Morgan. Beginning in 1953, he submitted “Weldona Notes” (“Bird Notes from Weldona” in some issues). He detailed when birds arrived in spring, how they fared through breeding season, and observations of migration and winter residents. Known locally as “[the cowboy artist](#),” Rollin had earlier displayed some of his paintings at a monthly meeting in 1940. After that, he gave the club one of his bird paintings as a gift each year through the 1950s. The bird club even exhibited Rollin's bird works.

Despite consistent contributions by authors like Rollin and others, it was challenging to produce even six issues of *Colorado Bird Notes* each year. In 1965, the bird club board voted to change the newsletter's format and name. The result was a mouthful. *THE MONTHLY REPORT OF FIELD OBSERVATIONS of the Denver Field Ornithologists* abandoned feature-type articles and focused on getting meeting notices and field trip details to members in a more timely way. After the notices came lists of previous trips and special bird counts with detailed information about the species seen. The [new, shorter newsletter](#) really did go out each month through the 1970s. (Past issues of this and other club publications are viewable on the [DFO website](#).)

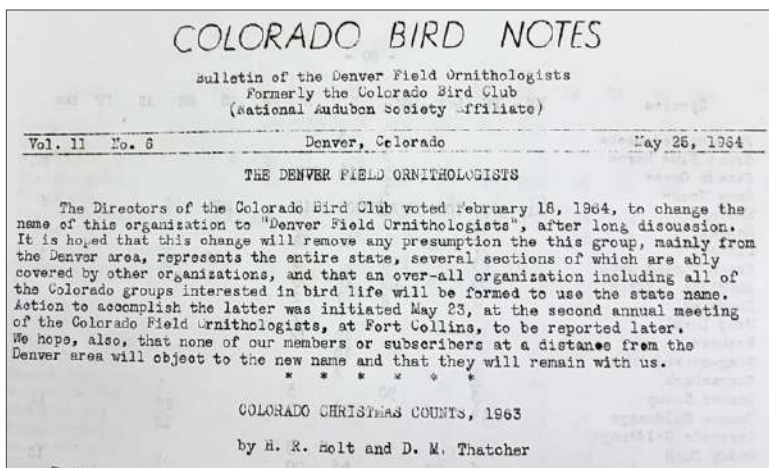
That unwieldy name, however, became an issue for some club leaders, so DFO held a contest to choose a new one. Initially, when the majority of those who responded wanted to keep the name the same, the new-name idea was dropped. But in November 1971, newsletter editor **Harold Holt** announced at a board meeting that he would resign unless the newsletter was renamed *The Lark Bunting*, for Colorado's state bird. The board swiftly complied with his demand. The new name, with a black-and-white sketch of a male Lark Bunting perched on a Plains yucca plant, appeared on the [December 1971 issue](#). The name and an image of the bird (in color since 2011) have remained on the cover ever since.



Embroidered DFO patch from 1971

Painting of Lark Buntings by mid-20th century DFO member Howard Rollin
DMNS Archives

Continued on page 23



Images top to bottom:

Club bulletin news in 1964 of name change to DFO
DMNS Archives

Colorado Bird Club members scanning Barr Lake from dam on 1953 field trip
Margaret Pritchett

L to R, members Margaret Miller, Mary Crow Kirsher and Margaret Pritchett on a field trip to Daniels Park
DMNS Archives

DFO @ 90 cont from page 22

Harold Holt was that influential for good reason. For several years in a row, he presented a DFO program featuring his field photographs of birds. In the decades before modern cameras and filmless digital imagery, photography was an expensive hobby that demanded great skill, particularly where birds were the subject. Holt served as club president and held other leadership positions over the years. He also organized Colorado's original Rare Bird Alert with **Mildred Snyder** in 1970. Volunteers signed up to be on a pyramid-like "telephone tree" to spread the word quickly and widely with multiplying calls to other birders when a rare bird was reported. The alert continued to operate well into the 21st century, and in recognition for this and his other contributions to the club, Holt was awarded a life membership in 1972.

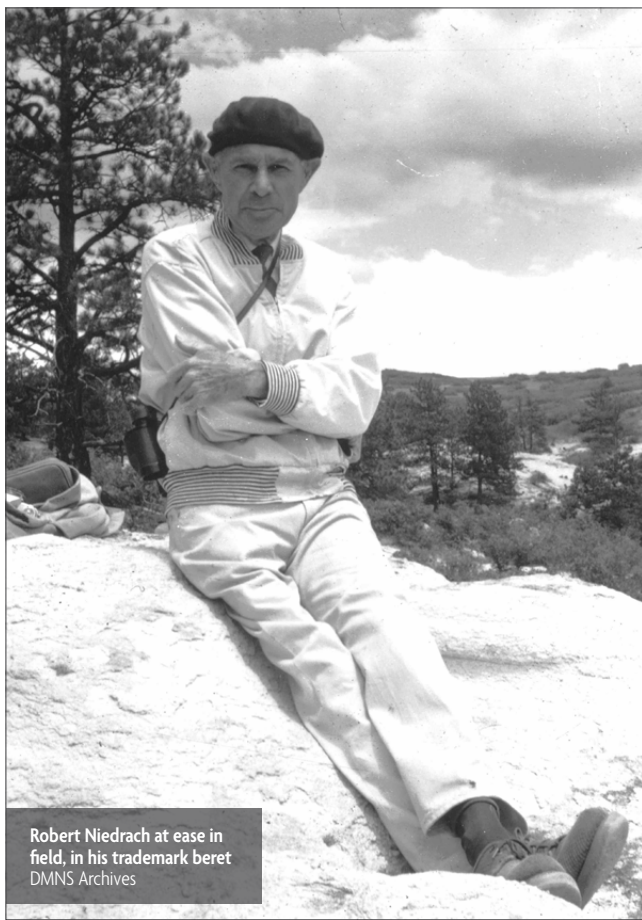
DFO matures, conservation comes of age

The mid-century era in which young DFO was maturing also included growing national and global environmental movements. The DFO meeting minutes through those decades include increased mention of programs on conservation topics (national and local) and letter-writing campaigns for legislative action to protect birds, especially raptors.

Imagine it: As late as 1953, a cash bounty existed on Bald Eagles in Alaska, where salmon fishermen erroneously believed the birds threatened their catch. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 sounded the alarm on harmful pesticides threatening bird populations. In 1966, the Endangered Species Preservation Act was passed, and a year later, the Bald Eagle was placed on the endangered list.

The table was set. The first Earth Day was observed in April 1970. Just three months later, the Environmental Protection Agency was signed into law. On the heels of all this, in 1972 the new EPA banned the pesticide DDT, whose secondary effects imperiled eagles and other birds.

Continued on page 24



Robert Niedrach at ease in field, in his trademark beret
DMNS Archives

DFO @ 90 *cont from page 23*

Throughout those times of seismic environmental change, the club regularly discussed and debated how to respond to conservation challenges on behalf of birds. The birding club was living up to its founders' original statement of purpose: to promote interest in "the study and preservation of birds and their habitat," and to support "local and national movements for birds' protection."

Bird club at a crossroads

In the midst of heightened concern about the environment and what that meant for birds, DFO wrestled with what might be considered its most important decision — whether or not to become a chapter of the National Audubon Society.

Technically, the Colorado Bird Club *did* "affiliate" with National Audubon in 1958, but that wasn't the same as being a chapter. The club merely paid \$15 a year for an affiliation status that carried the prestige of Audubon and its conservation programs, along with a copy of Audubon's magazine.

Ten years later, the idea of a closer affiliation with National Audubon was broached. On May 16, 1968, Audubon's **William Goodall** and Prof. **Gus Swanson**, head of Colorado State

University's Department of Fishery and Wildlife Biology, attended a special meeting of DFO members to discuss what it would mean to be a chapter of Audubon. They enumerated the advantages of becoming an official part of a well-known conservation group that welcomed nonprofessionals, including Audubon's focus on the education of young people and adults alike.

The requirements for becoming a chapter were outlined. The name of the club would have to change to include "Audubon." Dues would rise to \$10 a year, \$4 of which would be returned to the local club. Finally, Audubon recommended that a formal vote of DFO members should happen at a later date and that at least 80% of members should favor becoming an Audubon chapter before going forward.

The DFO Board formed a committee, which Lois Webster agreed to chair, that would discuss the relevant issues and recommend to the membership whether to join National Audubon. Hugh Kingery agreed to work with Webster on a presentation for the Sept. 24 general membership meeting.

DFO members gathered that night in the Bird Room at the museum, and newly elected president **Patty Echelmeyer** presided. The committee resolution proposed that DFO disband to form a new Denver chapter of National Audubon. A long discussion among the membership followed.

A defining debate: the soul of DFO

Advocating for a "yes" vote, Webster said being an Audubon chapter would give the club more publicity and greater prestige, leading to growth. "We need more conservation work and more action," she said. Kingery also supported the motion but clarified it. DFO would disband only IF a charter was granted for a new Audubon chapter. The committee felt that if both DFO and an Audubon chapter existed, they would be two weak organizations.

Continued on page 25

DFO member **Dick Lindstrom** advocated for a no vote. He believed the club would become more a historical society than a birding club. Other members feared that field trips, which DFO led every Saturday and Sunday throughout the year, might not continue at that level. The dues increase may also have concerned others. DFO annual individual dues were only \$3 at the time.

Former DFO president **Thompson Marsh**, a University of Denver law professor, avid birder and club member since 1954, was concerned that club finances could not support the Audubon chapter responsibilities under discussion: organizing junior clubs, hosting screenings of National Audubon films, and addressing environmental legislation. “Shall we begin with a new organization overloaded?” he asked. Thompson felt strongly that no ornithological club had done as much for birds as DFO had. He urged club members to “not risk destruction of an already effective organization.”

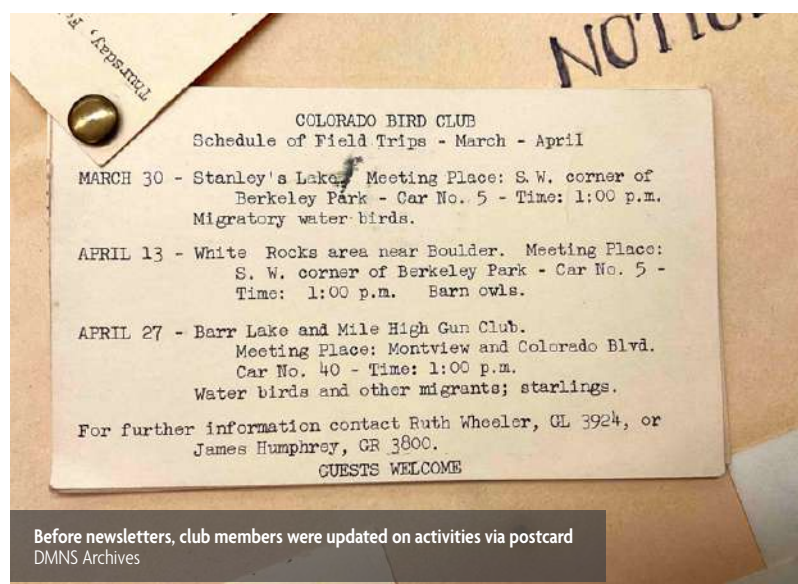
DFO’s membership at the time was 168 people. Sixty-one of them were present at the meeting. Under the club’s bylaws, motions required a two-thirds vote to pass. If the “nays” prevailed, an Audubon chapter could still be formed, but DFO would continue as an independent birding club.

When the votes were tallied, 17 members voted yes and 44 voted no. The motion failed. Immediately, those who still wanted to form an Audubon chapter adjourned to an adjoining room to do just that — even skipping one of Harold Holt’s much-anticipated presentations of his bird photographs.

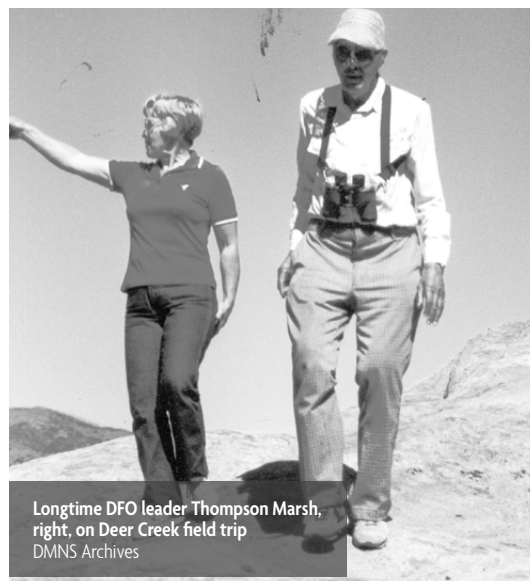
Looking back — and going forward as friends

Nearly half a century later, Kingery reflected on that decisive meeting during a 2014 oral history interview at the museum. He recalled that members in 1968 didn’t want to convert DFO into an Audubon chapter because they feared it would dilute the club’s field trip schedule, a club endeavor as highly valued then as it is now. Kingery noted that DFO’s primary focus was birdwatching, while Audubon’s broader approach included environmental activism and education.

In an interesting postscript, a brief note in the minutes of the DFO Board meeting a month later, in October 1968, states that Bailey was against DFO’s “losing its identity.” The remark suggests that Bailey and Niedrach may have advocated behind the scenes against joining National Audubon. Marsh’s emphatic statement the night of the membership meeting may also have helped sway the vote. Marsh questioned the Webster committee’s assertion that there wasn’t room for two bird clubs in Denver. He reminded members of the unique nature of their cherished organization.



Before newsletters, club members were updated on activities via postcard
DMNS Archives



Longtime DFO leader Thompson Marsh, right, on Deer Creek field trip
DMNS Archives

Continued on page 26

Kingery remembers Marsh as an imposing man and an interesting guy known for his singular devotion to birding. Marsh walked to work at the DU law school with binoculars around his neck, birding as he went. He had a long life list and would travel “at the drop of a phone call” to see a new rare bird, sometimes taking a call while teaching, then heading for the airport immediately after class.

Although Hugh and Thompson took different sides in the Audubon debate, the Kingerys and Marshes were friends outside of DFO, and their friendship endured. Such collegiality appears to have reflected the organization as a whole. “Cooperation with Audubon Chapter was urged,” the recording secretary noted in the minutes of the October 1968 DFO Board meeting. In August 1970, the clubs organized a joint DFO-Denver Audubon field trip to Staunton Ranch.

Collegiality, in fact, is one of the core values that define DFO to this day. Like Bailey and Niedrach, like Marsh and Kingery, like bird club founders Pritchett and Huron, and like so many others, we are “always headed afield” (a favorite Bailey phrase) to observe birds and record what we see. We return with a greater appreciation for birdlife, the natural environment and each other.

We’ll tell more stories of the people who made DFO a truly special organization when we publish Part 3 of *DFO @ 90* in July. Until then, good spring and early summer birding!

READ DFO @ 90, PART 1

The Lark Bunting, January 2025, page 14

DFO @ 90 HISTORY, PART 2

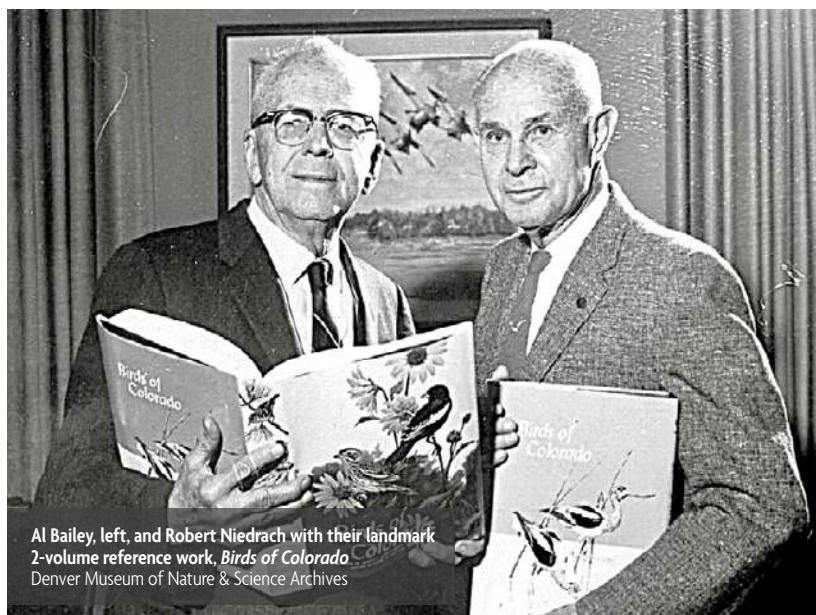
Bailey & Niedrach: Partners, friends, and advocates for bird science — and birders

Sharon Tinianow

From its 1935 beginnings as the Colorado Bird Club, the 20th-century history of Denver Field Ornithologists is intertwined with the city’s hub of natural science inquiry and exhibition — first as the Colorado Museum of Natural History, later the Denver Museum of Natural History and today, the Denver Museum of Nature & Science.

At the same time, the museum’s two most dynamic personalities and advocates for bird science — **Alfred Bailey** and **Robert Niedrach** — were inextricably linked to DFO and its membership. As we mark the club’s 90th anniversary this year, *The Lark Bunting* pauses in retelling DFO’s history to chronicle the lives of Bailey and Niedrach, life members together forever in the life of our club.

Alfred Marshall Bailey was born in 1894 in Iowa City, IA, and graduated in 1916 from the University of Iowa, where he learned museum exhibition techniques from **Homer R. Dill**, master bird taxidermist and zoologist. In an itinerant early career, Bailey was curator of birds for the Louisiana State Museum and surveyed southwestern Alaska for the Bureau of Biological Survey (now US Fish & Wildlife Service).



Al Bailey, left, and Robert Niedrach with their landmark 2-volume reference work, *Birds of Colorado*. Denver Museum of Nature & Science Archives

Continued on page 27



Niedrach preparing a Wild Turkey for museum exhibit
DMNS Archives

BAILEY & NIEDRACH *cont from page 26*

In the 1920s, he was a curator briefly at the Colorado Museum of Natural History (now Denver Museum of Nature & Science) before transferring to the Field Museum in Chicago. By 1927 he was director of the Chicago Academy of Sciences. Within a decade, he would return to Colorado to become museum director in 1936, the year after the Colorado Bird Club was founded in the museum.

Bailey would spend the rest of his distinguished career there alongside **Robert James Niedrach**, the ornithology instructor so instrumental in the bird club's formation. Born in 1889 in Union Hill, NJ, Niedrach grew up exploring meadows along the Hackensack River and the Palisades, across the Hudson River from Manhattan. He, too, learned taxidermy (a necessary museum skill in exhibiting birds and other wildlife) and eventually met **Frederick C. Lincoln**, who became the Denver museum's curator of birds. Niedrach followed Lincoln to Denver in 1912 to be his assistant. After serving in the Army during World War I, he returned to Denver. More than a decade later, he became curator of birds just before Bailey arrived as museum director.

During his first stint at the Denver museum, Bailey and his wife **Muriel** fell in love with Colorado. "One of the delights of a naturalist living in Denver," Bailey wrote in his autobiography, "has been the varied type of country available within a day's run from prairie of the Upper Sonoran Zone, at an altitude of 3,000 feet upward to mountain summits of the Alpine Zone over 14,000 feet in height."

Although they had moved to Chicago, the Bailey family came back to Denver whenever possible to renew acquaintances with friends and staff. Bailey himself also did some field work in the mountains and on the plains. During Bailey's 1920s forays from Denver into the field, it was Niedrach who went with him. Bailey's delight in the natural environment, coupled with a lower cost of living in Denver and a much shorter commute to work, made returning to Denver to be the museum's second director an easy decision. And now, he lived in Park Hill, only a 10-minute walk from the office.

Bailey was known for his ability to maintain and advance the scientific standards of a museum while extending its usefulness to its members. His accomplishments as an author and filmmaker contributed to the study and appreciation of birds and birdlife. His personal charm and integrity endeared him to the museum staff. Devoted to his work, he was an excellent manager — efficient, prudent and possessed of good business sense.

Niedrach's strengths were field and exhibit work. He supervised the installation of more than 50 of the museum's ageless habitat dioramas, still on display in today's museum. Bailey and many others on staff particularly valued Niedrach's observational, interpretive, and photographic skills. He was an outstanding all-around naturalist, fully committed to the museum's educational role in the community. Niedrach's work with the bird club reflected that commitment.

Bailey valued him greatly. "I was fortunate to have Robert J. Niedrach as an associate, and he literally covered the many habitats of the state, probably obtaining a better first-hand knowledge of the plants and animals of the various life zones than any other

Continued on page 28

naturalist,” Bailey wrote. The two were frequently in the field together, mostly to make films of birds for museum programs and lectures, and photographs for their magnum opus together — *Birds of Colorado* (1965), a two-volume, 885-page essential reference work for the state’s birdlife. Although he was director, Bailey was able to “go afield” frequently because the museum board’s president had an office there and could “keep an eye on things” for him.

Those excursions were no walk in the park. They lugged cameras (including a German-made Exakta, state-of-the-art for its time), extra lights, tripods, ladders and materials to build bird blinds with them to every part of Colorado. Their work required infinite patience and no small amount of risk. Perhaps the epitome of this was their effort to photograph and film Golden Eagles. Bailey called the species the finest bird of prey in North America.

Working in Daniels Park, west of present-day Castle Pines in Douglas County, Niedrach and Bailey set up a blind as close as they could to an active nest. This often meant perching the blind in a tree or on a cliff and sitting patiently on a precarious, uncomfortable seat until the birds were at ease. But the camouflage could not prevent the camera’s whirring and glints of light off its lens from spooking the adult eagles. To succeed, they had to climb to their blind before dawn and prepare to sit patiently for hours until the birds were comfortable enough to show up and be photographed.

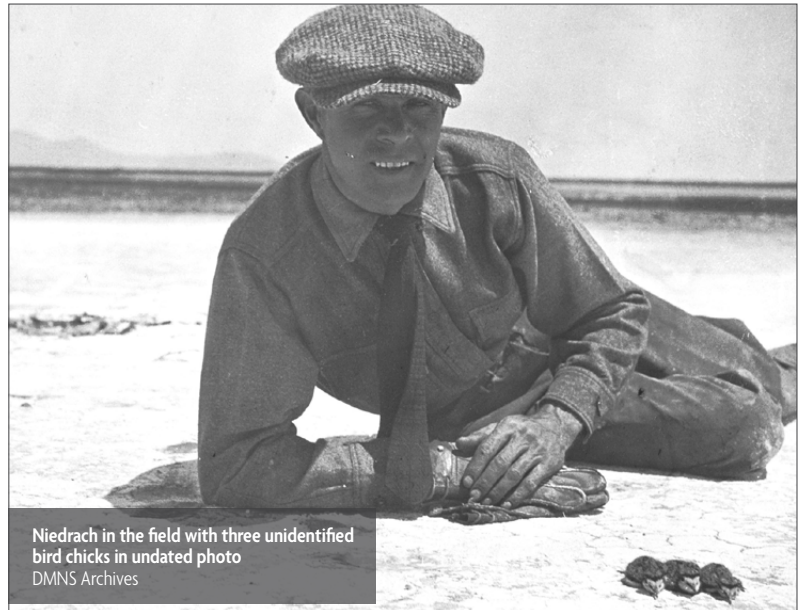
At another Golden Eagle observation site in Weld County, Bailey and Niedrach thought they’d found a perfect location, with a nesting pair not easily startled. They soon learned, however, that they couldn’t get close enough for good photos because a number of “pugnacious” rattlesnakes were in the way. Only later did they learn what the locals called this location: Rattlesnake Hill.

On a fossil hunting trip near the Kansas line, Niedrach found a young raven. Thinking he was

Continued on page 29



Bailey photographing Golden Eagle chicks at nest outside Denver
DMNS Archives



Niedrach in the field with three unidentified bird chicks in undated photo
DMNS Archives



Niedrach with Golden Eagle nestling in undated photo
DMNS Archives



Niedrach with pet raven, Dick
DMNS Archives

BAILEY & NIEDRACH *cont from page 28*

a White-necked Raven (what today's Chihuahuan Raven was once called) and thought to be extinct in Colorado, Niedrach brought the bird home to raise. He named the bird **Dick** and gave him free rein of the house. Dick bonded with Niedrach, coming when he whistled (and only for Niedrach) and greeting him with joyful noise when he returned home from the museum each day.

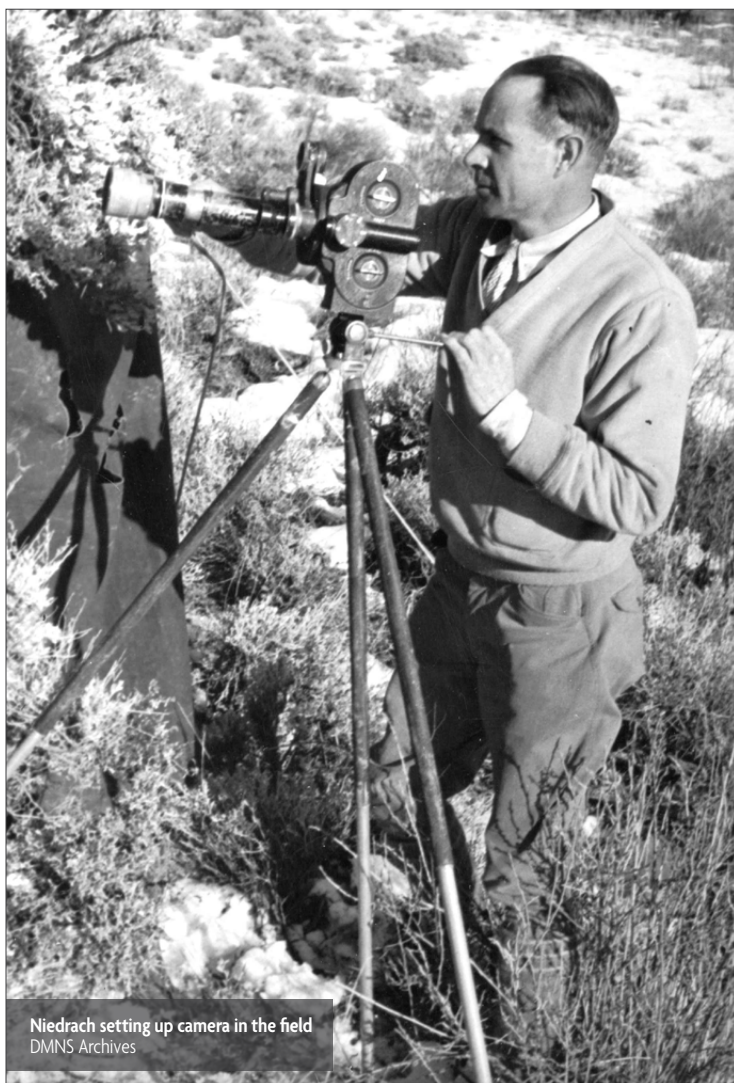
Dick seemed to think his job was to help fight the dandelion invasion in Niedrach's yard by pulling the weeds out by the root. One problem: Dick could not tell a dandelion from a dahlia. Noting the Corvid family's high intelligence, Niedrach once told an interviewer from *The Denver Post* that perhaps Dick's difficulty was that both plant names start with the letter D.

Dick was not his only adoptee. In February 1938, Niedrach and Bailey were in the field at Barr Lake, apparently collecting museum specimens. When Niedrach shot a Black-tailed Jackrabbit that turned out to be pregnant, he performed a caesarean and out slipped one young. Niedrach took the bunny home and named him **Ed**, feeding it milk from a medicine dropper. Ed grew quickly and soon was hopping circles around the kitchen. [The long-eared bunny even came to his wife, Alice, when she clapped her hands.] At two months of age, Ed was liberated back to the wild.

Both critter stories were written up in the local papers. It didn't seem to bother Niedrach that the press was more interested in his wild adoptees than in the honorary doctorate the University of Colorado awarded him. Bailey was of similar good humor. He good-naturedly accepted when people (including museum contacts abroad in formal correspondence) nicknamed him "**Bill**" after the popular, turn-of-the-century music hall anthem "(Won't You Come Home) Bill Bailey."

"Bill" Bailey's distinguished career included a doctorate in science from Norwich University and a doctorate in public service from the University of Denver, as well as the Malcolm Glenn Wyer Award for distinguished service in adult education from the Adult Education Council of Metropolitan Denver.

Continued on page 30



Niedrach setting up camera in the field
DMNS Archives

Bailey and Niedrach's families more than tolerated the colleague-scientists' attraction to "being afield," to use Bailey's phrase. His daughter, **Patricia Bailey Witherspoon**, went along on their field excursions and operated the cameras. Bailey's grandson, **Jack Murphy**, frequently accompanied, too. Sometimes the two families would go to a favorite spot to picnic and enjoy the view from the cliffs of Daniels Park — the same Douglas County ridge where the two men had once crept close to Golden Eagles from behind a blind. In his journal, Bailey recorded his awe at the view "across the great valley, the sunset glowing on Mount Evans [now Mt. Blue Sky] and the mountains to the north. One could grow poetic about the finest panorama this side of paradise — the purples and fast-changing colors."

Three years after DFO and the US Forest Service dedicated the [Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area](#) in the Summit County wilderness north of Silverthorne, mortality overtook his longtime friend and colleague. Robert J. Niedrach, also retired but still involved as curator emeritus at the museum, died there in 1974. A fatal heart attack struck as Niedrach was backing his car out of the museum parking lot.

Four years later, in March 1978, Barr Lake State Park officially opened, and the [Robert J. Niedrach Boardwalk Trail](#) was dedicated in his memory. It is an appropriately birdy spot. Later that year, Alfred W. Bailey died, too, from a heart condition. He is buried in Denver's Fairmount Cemetery.

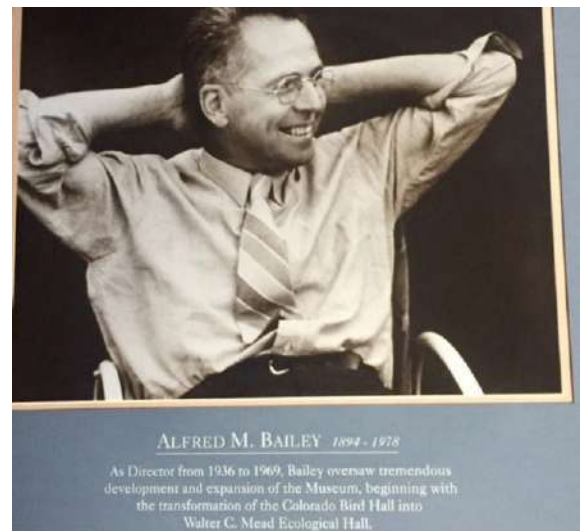
Four decades after the club was founded, the passings of Bailey and Niedrach ended an eventful era for DFO. But more new members were already assuming leadership roles for the next era, and for the new century beyond. As we honor their invaluable contributions to DFO this anniversary year, we recognize that the lives of the people in it then and now make Denver Field Ornithologists the earnest and enduring organization it is today.



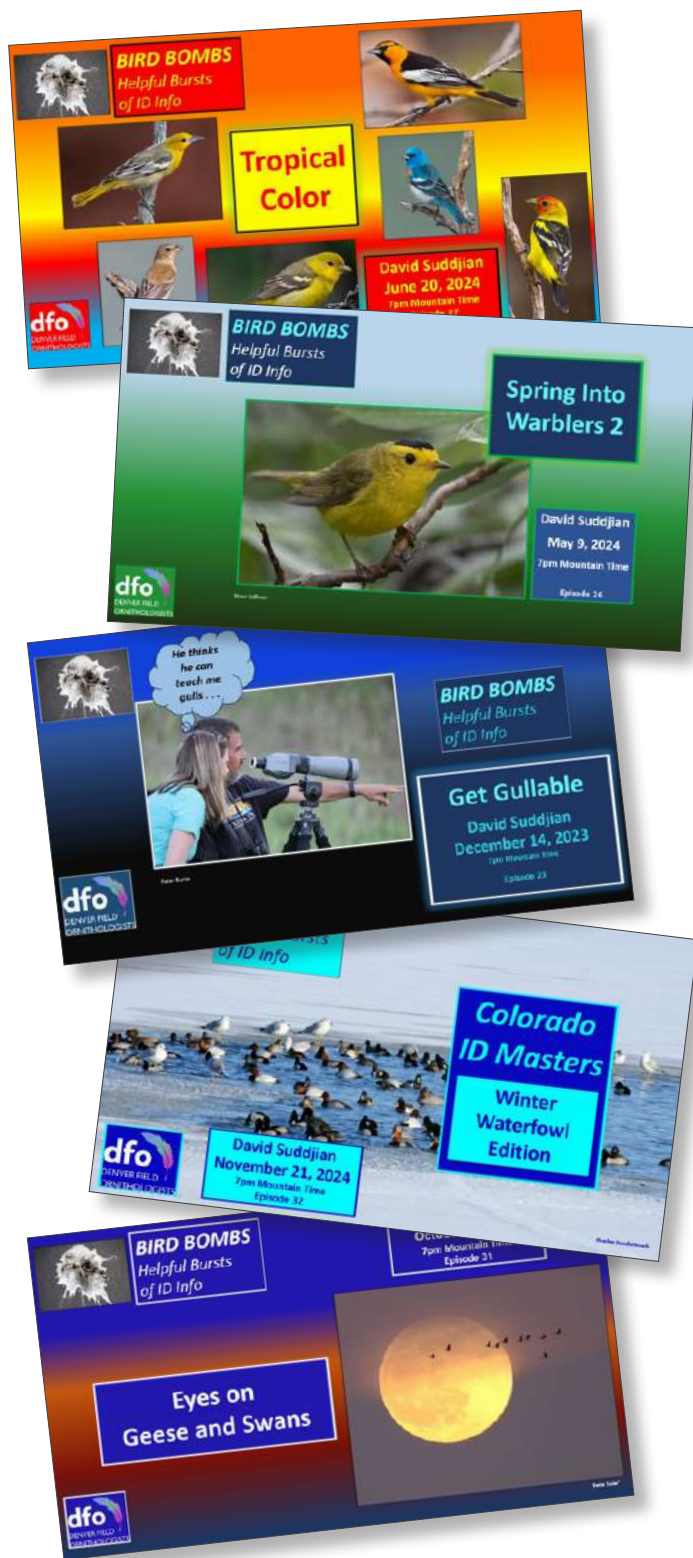
Top right:
Mexico's Sierra Madre Sparrow named
Xenospiza baileyi in Bailey's honor
Wikipedia Commons

Left:
Bailey with daughter Patricia at dedication
of Bailey Bird Nesting Area in 1971
DMNS Archives Margaret Pritchett

Bottom right:
Bailey at ease, from undated
museum tribute after his death
DMNS Archives



BIRD BOMBS awayyy! Dropping DFO avian ID tips For 3 years and counting



Patrick O'Driscoll

Three years ago this April, the first “**BIRD BOMB**” landed on a largely unsuspecting audience. Creator **David Suddjian**, expert birder and chair of the DFO Field Trips Committee, announced that this short Zoom webinar would deliver “helpful bursts of ID info” on spring migrant warblers about to arrive in Colorado.

The cheeky and irreverent logo that accompanied his “[Spring into Warblers](#)” session triggered chuckles. Its abstract windshield *SPLOTCH!* of white-black guano from an unseen bird flying overhead was a . . . **bird . . . bomb**. Get it?!

Thirty-six episodes later, everyone gets it. Suddjian’s revolving series of intensive but easy-going tutorials on field ID markers (species size, shape, behavior, plumage, color, habitat), with photo quizzes and other savvy tips, has drawn an enthusiastic following, from birding beginners to experts. Those who can’t catch an initial webinar live (often on the second Thursday of the month) can view the Zoom video days later. The three dozen Bird Bombs episodes so far reside in viewable archives on both the [DFO website](#) and [DFO’s YouTube channel](#).

“Outside of DFO field trips, the *Bird Bombs* series is the most helpful resource I’ve come across for understanding bird ID, behaviors, and distribution,” says **Ryan Corda**, new to birding in 2024 and a “frequent flier” since then on DFO outings. “Even beyond traditional field guides and eBird’s various resources, I find myself coming back to *Bird Bombs* episodes over and over again.”

Julia Gwinn, an Audubon master birder, revisits episodes to prepare for field outings: “Their concise and targeted focus on specific birds or topics makes them incredibly valuable. Having access to an entire library is a fantastic resource for gearing up for spring migration or field trips.”

Continued on page 32

Janet Peters, youth education coordinator for DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch, says the content and presentation rival paid-tuition programs online: "I still can't believe these are free."

The series' popularity "has exceeded my expectations," Suddjian says. He plans to continue producing new *Bird Bombs* at least through 2025 and perhaps beyond. This year's wrinkle will be several episodes focused on the varied territories and landscapes inhabited by Colorado's bird communities. "I am calling them 'Habitat Blasts.'"

Suddjian came up with *Bird Bombs* to augment "Developing Birders," a field-trip theme he coined after becoming Field Trips chair in 2021: "The idea was for short videos to capture the sort of information I was sharing on my field trips." Learning the technical tricks of video production, however, "was not so practical for me," he adds. But when DFO turned to Zoom for programs and meetings in the physical isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the platform's automatic recordings were the perfect answer. Thus, "they're not one-off presentations for whoever registered to watch them live."

New episodes coincide whenever possible with seasonal bursts of birding activity: spring and fall migration, nesting and fledging of young, summer sparrows and flycatchers, winter waterfowl, shorebird comings and goings, and so forth. He also labels the webinars for maximum attraction. Colorful posters promote each episode. Wordplay in episode titles, whether clever turns or puns, adds to the charm, from "Better Duck!" and "I'm Molting!" to "4 & 20 Blackbirds" and a perennial favorite, "I Wish They All Could Be California Gulls."

"After *Bird Bombs* I cannot look at a gull without thinking 'Beach Boys!' and whether the gull is 'laid back,'" says DFO member **Chris Curwen**, recalling a tip about different gull postures. "They inject a clever dose of enthusiasm and pointers to help me grasp those fleeting clues that make bird identification rewarding."

"So much information about the topic is available in one place," adds member **Dana Hiatt**. "I have a book about gulls that I love and a couple of field guides with gull information. But if I watch — and watch again on tape — a *Bird Bombs* about gulls, I get a really good review of all of the hints and tips for ID."

Suddjian says he is "humbled, happily, by how helpful the series has been for so many birders." He credits the nearly 100 photographers who have provided the "interesting and informative" photos that enhance his bird ID lessons. In alphabetical order, he shouts-out "key contributor" photographers: **Anne Craig, Ted Floyd, George Ho, Charles Hundertmark, Ron LeValley, Jim Merritt, Steven Mlodinow, Tresa Moulton, Dale Pate, Rob Raker, JoAnn Potter Riggle, Diane Roberts, Pete Sole, and Brian Sullivan**. He also praises collaborator and DFO trip leader **Laura Steadman** for her "hot seat" episode review and quiz segments and handling viewer Q&As, and he thanks members **Gigi Zarzuela** and **Nate Bond** for similar help.

Corda appreciates how Suddjian often uses photos that show how we actually see birds in the field — obscured and half-hidden behind tree leaves, not the polished images and ideal views found in field guides. "The quizzes are real practice," adds *Bird Bombs* fan **Debra Strike**. "The programs are making me a better birder."

"Keep on *Bird Bombing*," says Curwen, "you guys make birding fun."





THE LIVES OF BIRDS

Hummingbirds love our flowers — and we love what they do for our gardens



Rufous Hummingbird
John Breitsch



Anna's Hummingbird
John Breitsch

Jared Del Rosso

Birds are underappreciated landscapers. Corvids cultivate oak forests by caching acorns that sometimes take root. By eating and then excreting, winter flocks of starlings, robins, and waxwings scarify enormous quantities of seeds — juniper, chokecherry, currant, and invasive buckthorn, especially. If you've found a shrub growing where you wouldn't expect — along a fence line, beneath your favorite backyard tree, even in the crook of that tree — chances are good that a songbird's fertile dropping put it there.

Hummingbirds (family *Trochilidae*) don't do any of this, but their effect on our landscapes is equally profound. As we wait for the first trills of male Broad-tailed Hummingbirds to signal spring, it's a good time to take stock of the role these tiny, vividly hued birds play in our lives.

One contribution is obvious: Hummers pollinate flowers. They prefer their blossoms red and tubular. Using long bills and tongues, hummingbirds collect nectar at the bottom of those tubes. The flowers, in turn, dust the birds' faces with pollen. When they hum along to the next bloom, they bring that pollen with them.

Here in Colorado, our most common hummingbird, the Broad-tailed, favors several wildflowers that are relatively common in the wild and increasingly common in urban and suburban gardens: Western Red Columbine (*Aquilegia elegantula*), Scarlet Gilia (*Ipomopsis aggregata*), penstemons, paintbrushes (*Castilleja* spp.), and Kingcup Cactus (*Echinocereus triglochidiatus*). I've also observed Broad-tails visiting wild-growing Golden Currants (*Ribes aureum*) in early spring in metro Denver and Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) at Roxborough State Park in mid-summer. Black-chinned Hummingbird, our other common species, browses similar selections of plants.

Continued on page 34



Broad-tailed Hummingbird at Sunset Crater Penstemon
Jared Del Rosso

Visiting flowers is quintessential hummingbird behavior. No matter that they are also voracious hunters — catching tiny flying insects almost as effectively as swifts or nightjars (both close relatives of hummingbirds). Besides the garish coloring of the males, I suspect what endears hummingbirds to us is that they visit equally garish flowers. The colors are almost too much: Emerald, ruby and flaming-orange birds meet scarlet blooms. I've spent summer hours at the edge of my garden, hoping for one clear photograph that does justice to the intensity of hummingbird meeting penstemon.

Hummers alter landscapes in another way: They use us. Of all the bird families, humans admire them perhaps the most. We can't move Heaven, but we'll literally move Earth to attract them into our yards.

In my garden, my preferences track with those of hummingbirds. A single Firecracker Penstemon (*Penstemon eatonii*) that I planted years ago is now a patch that a male Broad-tailed greedily defends in May. Remarkably, this particular plant blooms with the final May snowstorm of the year. When it bounces back, hummingbirds are all too happy to visit.

Inspired by this bird-blossom interplay, I've grown a three-season garden buffet for hummingbirds. In early spring, Golden Currants, Firecracker Penstemon, and Dusky Penstemon (*P. whippleanus*) bloom in early

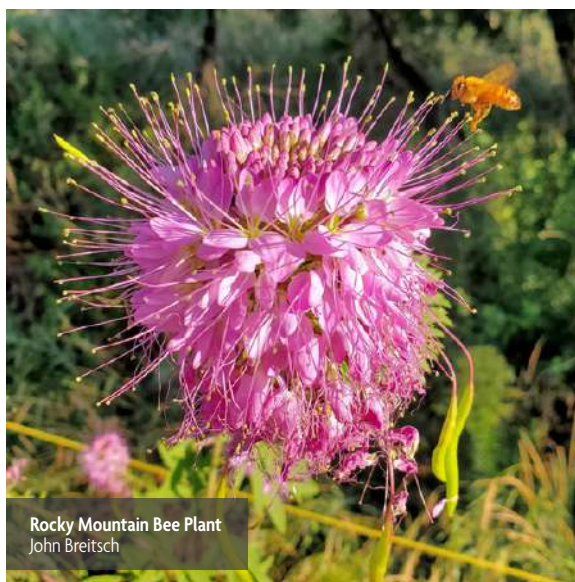
About “hummingbird-friendly” gardening

Take care with plants and seeds labeled “hummingbird-friendly,” as many are introduced species. I especially hesitate to recommend BBB Seed's “Wildflowers to Attract Hummingbirds” mix, though I like many of BBB's individual seed packs. That particular mix contains Rocket Larkspur, which is quite weedy, and all parts of the plant are highly toxic. Of the other retailers I listed in this essay, only Prairie Moon exclusively sells plants and seeds native to the US. However, all have extensive selections of native and near native plants. For more information, see the guides provided by [Wild Ones Front Range](#) or [Rocky Mountain Audubon](#).

Continued on page 35



Two-tailed Swallowtail on Firecracker Penstemon
Jared Del Rosso



Rocky Mountain Bee Plant
John Breitsch



Black-chinned Hummingbird
John Breitsch

HUMMINGBIRDS *cont from page 34*

spring. Through early and mid-summer, the smorgasbord of native and near-native wildflowers varies wildly. Neighborhood Broad-tails feast on Beardlip Penstemon (*P. barbatus*), Sunset Crater Penstemon (*P. clutei*), Nodding Onion (*Allium cernuum*), Showy Milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*), Rocky Mountain Bee Plant (*Cleomella serrulate*), California Fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*), Scarlet Gilia, “Red Birds in a Tree” (*Scrophularia macrantha*), and Desert Willow (*Chilopsis linearis*).

When summer gives way to autumn, the mint family takes over: Autumn Sage (*Salvia greggii*), Sunset Hyssop (*Agastache rupestris*), and Mosquito Plant (*Agastache cana*). Don’t let that last name mislead you. It’s so named for its alleged ability to repel mosquitoes. I find it happier in my suburban yard south of Denver than Sunset Hyssop, a plant more commonly sold at nurseries.

“Hummingbird-friendly” plants are big business for wildflower nurseries. Major retailers of regional natives and/or xeric plants grow heaps of them. The [Plant Select](#) nonprofit collaboration classifies more than two dozen of its selections as hummingbird-friendly. [Prairie Moon Nursery](#) lists 56 plants and seeds packs for hummingbirds. [High Country Gardens](#) offers an astonishing 186. Most seed providers curate mixes said to attract hummingbirds. Locally, [Botanical Interests](#) of Broomfield has its “Hummingbird Haven” mix, as does [BBB Seed](#) of Boulder.

We haven’t just remade the landscape in service of hummingbirds. We’ve also redecorated it. Feeders are outdoor *décor du jour*. There are [two primary ways](#) to fashion hummingbird feeders: as saucers, with the sugar-water in a flat dish within perching and feeding reach, and as inverted-bottle feeders, with a container of sugar-water above the feeding area. But discerning birdwatchers can choose from all sorts of designs fashioned from clear glass, ornate blown glass, orbs, wine bottles, antique red bottles, and red plastic. There are feeder rings and even hummingbird feeder masks you can wear for the ultimate close-up view. The choices seem almost as numerous as the hummingbird species themselves. (There are 363 kinds of hummingbird, one of the bird world’s most diverse families.)

The history of hummingbird feeders dates to the late 1920s and early 1930s. But even before that, people fed the birds simply by pouring sugar-water into a dish. The first may have been someone’s last-ditch effort to nurse a bird accidentally trapped indoors and exhausted trying to escape. An 1885 article in the ornithological journal [The Auk](#) recounted how a clever woman in Wisconsin nourished a Ruby-throated Hummingbird for almost two months. First she tried pouring sugar-water mixtures into the flowers of a gladiolus. Then she hung

Continued on page 36

a vial of the nectar amid petunia blooms. Others who fed indoor hummingbirds were more daring. In the [1907 edition of his field guide](#), *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America*, ornithologist **Frank Chapman** wrote: “The Hummingbird is curiously fearless. Sometimes one will probe a flower in the hand and when they fly into houses, as they pretty often do, they manifest but the smallest degree of suspicion and will feed at once upon sugar held between the lips.”

There are other, more profound relationships between hummingbirds and us. Most obvious, perhaps, is that we use some of the same plants for food. For the birds, it’s the nectar. For us, it’s the fruit that their pollination produces. Hummers are especially important pollinators of currants and blueberries, both valuable to humans. They also have mythic and literal associations with tobacco plants, especially in indigenous peoples’ beliefs in the Americas.

And then there’s this: By using our landscapes to attract hummingbirds, we’re actually altering their behavior and ranges. A [2019 study](#) documented the expansion of the range of Anna’s Hummingbird from the Baja Peninsula north into colder locations with higher densities of people’s homes. Using [Project FeederWatch](#) data, the study’s authors also found the species was more likely to visit feeders in there than in its historical range. The appearance of Anna’s farther north may have led to changes in *human* behavior, too. More people in the bird’s new northerly range were putting up feeders to attract the species, which was not the case in its historical range.

At first glance, this all seems good news. In a time of declining bird populations, isn’t a greater range for Anna’s Hummingbird a welcome development? The authors aren’t sure. They write that “long-term ecological consequences of the . . . range expansion remain uncertain.” Of note is that Anna’s Hummingbirds are moving into the historical range of Black-chinned and Rufous hummingbirds. As anyone who’s watched hummers knows, species competition is fierce for territories and food. How the arrival of Anna’s will affect Black-chinned and Rufous populations is yet to be seen.

Here in Colorado, we’ve also witnessed changes in hummingbird distributions. The range of Black-chinned Hummingbirds has crept east and northeast over the past 40 years. The cause is not yet clear. Territorial competition in their historical range, climate warming, warmed micro-climates (e.g., the urban heat island), altered landscapes, and feeders all may be leading Black-chinned hummingbirds east.

Whatever the reasons, this much is certain: It’s a hummingbird’s world, and we’re just living in it.

The Lives of Birds is a recurring feature by DFO member and birder **Jared Del Rosso**, a wildflower gardener and sociologist with a special interest in urban and suburban nature. He’s also writing a book about *Whip-poor-wills* in American culture. Read more at his blog [The Lonesome Whip-poor-will](#).



Broad-tailed Hummingbird
visiting Sunset Hyssop
Jared Del Rosso



January, February, March DFO trips *In Focus*

Field trips in the three winter months included 47 total outings. Of those, participants on 22 trips took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 90-year-old club. If you’re on DFO trips in April, May and June, take a few shots of your fellow birders birding and send us the best for the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, coming out in early July. Send .JPG or .PNG photo files of birders in the field, with date/location of trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline for our July 2025 summer-quarter issue is **Monday, June 30**. Thanks!

JANUARY 1

Pueblo Birding (Pueblo County)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Ryan Corda, Scott Hammel, Ajit and Liza Antony,
Sarah Feigelson, Melissa Wetzig, John Batt, Dana Hiatt,
Kenneth Stuckey, Timothy Condon, Kris Saucke,
Ann Christensen, Betsy Goodwin,
Jonathan and Angela Hebel

Crowd of 16 New Year’s Day birders scopes Pueblo Reservoir
on DFO trip to various locations in and around the city
(Ryan Corda)



JANUARY 3

New Year’s Birding Blitz (Jefferson, Denver)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

John Batt, Eileen Warner,
Michelle Verostko, Virginia Gulakowski,
Robin Trevillian, Catherine Millard,
Amy Manning, Melody Serra

Field trippers pose on Jan. 3 “New Year’s Birding Blitz”
in Jefferson County, where leader David Suddjian
(3rd from right) notched his 10,000th eBird checklist

Continued on page 38

JANUARY 8
**El Paso County
Hotspots**
(El Paso)

Leader
Kip Miller

Participants

Anne Craig, Kenneth Stuckey,
Dana Hiatt, Andrea Duran,
David Suddjian, Melody Serra

DFO paparazzi mob star Golden-crowned
Sparrow at Garden of the Gods
during Jan. 8 field trip to
El Paso County hotspots
(Kip Miller)



JANUARY 11
**South Platte Park
— South End**
(Arapahoe)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants

Ryan Corda, Coreen Spellman,
Lynn Slaga, Kris Saucke, Shai Ronen,
Jeanne Marie Dillon, Sandy Mathias,
Nathan Crow, Shay Lyons

DFO field trippers pose on Jan. 11 in American
Dipper location beneath C-470 bridge across
South Platte River and South Platte Park
(David Suddjian)

Continued on page 39



JANUARY 15
Littleton
(Jefferson, Denver)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Melody Serra, Victoria Miles,
Coreen Spellman Bailey, Linda Purcell

Walking the Governor's Plaza community
parkway on Jan. 15 field trip to local spots in
western Littleton with a stop later at Marston
Reservoir in Denver for waterbirds
(Melody Serra)

JANUARY 17
Aurora Reservoir
(Arapahoe)

Leader
Cynthia Cestkowski

Participants
Bonnie Prado, Catherine Millard, Kris Tita,
Sue Summers, Amy Manning, Theresa Braymer,
Stephen Sears, Ethan Cleveland, Christine Macdonald

Jan. 17 field trippers bundled up at Aurora Reservoir the day the
big Arctic blast approached Colorado. The reservoir was 80% iced
but had ducks, gulls, hawks, 7 Bald Eagles and 2 Northern Harriers
until a cold wind brought in thousands of geese
(Cynthia Cestkowski)



JANUARY 25
Bluff Lake Nature Center
(Denver)

Leader
George Ho

Participants
Sharon Kelly, Christopher Keefe, Liz Cox,
Ryan Corda, Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine,
Zach Turner, John Rainwater, Nathan Woodward

Jan. 25 field trip participants pose at Denver's Bluff
Lake Nature Center after a 24-species outing in
snow and 17-degree temperatures
(George Ho)



Continued on page 40



JANUARY 26

Waterton Canyon (Jefferson)

Leader

Wes Donnell

Participants

Sarah Feigelson, Timothy Condon,
Diane Sanelli, Tim Redmond,
Michelle Trotter, Andrea Duran,
Sharon Tinianow, Caroline Armstrong

Field trippers pose along snow-packed trail up
Waterton Canyon on Jan. 26 outing. Unusual
sightings included a Red-breasted Merganser,
Rock Wrens, and more than 30 Spotted Towhees
(Sharon Tinianow)

FEBRUARY 9 **Super Duck Sunday III,** **South Platte Park** (Denver County)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Gigi Zarzuela, Amy Manning, Jordan Nicholls,
Sarah Feigelson, Paula Rosson, Timothy Condon,
Glenn Jacoby, Brian Huculak, Virginia Gulakowski, Ryan Corda

Trip leader David Suddjian briefs participants on DFO's annual Super Duck Sunday outing Feb. 9 at locations around South Platte Park. Super Duck Sunday III birders scored points for two duck "teams" whenever spotting "Divers" and "Dabblers." The score was close at halftime but diving ducks won out, 92-57, boosted by added points for species diversity and more courtship "field goals" and copulation "touchdowns"
(Gigi Zarzuela)



Continued on page 41



FEBRUARY 9 Boulder County Raptor Tour (Boulder)

Leaders
Donna Stumpp

Participants
Andrew Wertheimer, Becky Russell, Susan Blansett,
Matthew Fast, Deb Piranian, John Batt, John Rainwater

Participants in Feb. 16 raptor tour of north Boulder County had a very productive outing on a chilly (5 degrees to start) but sunny day: 6 Golden Eagles, 12 Bald Eagles, 15 Red-tailed Hawks, 8 Ferruginous Hawks and 3 American Kestrels
(Donna Stumpp)

FEBRUARY 16 Birds Plus + Nature Journaling, Audubon Kingery Center (Douglas-Jefferson)

Leaders
Carly Crow

Participants
Jason Bidgood, Diane Sanelli, Valerie Martino,
Jodi Haller, Claire Frazier, Megan Miller, Paula Rosson

Array of amazing sketchwork by the seven participants Feb. 16 in another of Carly Crow's popular Birds Plus + Nature Journaling field trips, this time a snowy trek through the Audubon Kingery Nature Center south of Chatfield SP (and indoor sketching session in the center HQ)
(Carly Crow)



FEBRUARY 23 Ken Caryl Valley (Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Gabby Licht, Melody Serra,
Laura Sheets, Scott Hammel, John Batt

Shadowy field trippers watch and listen for Northern Saw-whet Owls on a pre-dawn field trip Feb. 23 in Jefferson County's Ken Caryl Valley
(Melody Serra)



Continued on page 42



FEBRUARY 23

Barr Lake State Park (Adams)

Leader

Jason Bidgood

Participants

Timothy Condon, Sarah Feigelson, Michelle Verostko,
Jeanne Marie Dillon, Amy Manning, Lynn Slaga,
Becky Russell, Annette Megneyse

**Birders on DFO field trip to Barr Lake SP
on Feb. 23 seeking out a Barn Owl**
(Jason B. Bidgood)

MARCH 2 Prospect Park / Wheat Ridge Greenbelt (Jefferson)

Leaders

Gigi Zarzuela

Participants

Jason Bidgood, Julia Aukland,
Kris Saucke, Lynn Slaga, Ruolan Wu,
Ryan Corda, Ginny Gulakowski,
Theresa Braymer, Patricia Kuzma Sell,
Carol Cook

**Birders on trip leader Gigi Zarzuela's last
regular monthly trip to Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
(she moved to Seattle in March) focus together
on something good. The four-hour tour
checked 38 species**
(Gigi Zarzuela)



Continued on page 43



MARCH 9
South Platte Park, south end
(Arapahoe, Douglas)

Leader

Gigi Zarzuela and David Suddjian

Participants

Ryan Corda, Gabby Licht, Beth Partin,
Becky Russell, Alice Tariot, John Batt,
Victoria Miles, Cassandra Stroud,
Lynn Slaga, Coreen Spellman, Morgan Kahle

Field trippers scoping in South Platte Park during
March 9 field trip, the last led by DFO leader
Gigi Zarzuela before her move to Seattle. Zarzuela
with trip coleader (and DFO Field Trips chair)
David Suddjian. It was Gigi's 30th and final time
leading or co-leading a DFO trip
(David Suddjian)



MARCH 15
Chatfield State Park
(Douglas, Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Coreen Spellman, Christopher Keefe
Christine Macdonald, Cassandra Stroud,
Shay Lyons, Sofia Prado-Irwin,
Debra Strike, Jodi Haller,
Ryan Corda, Michelle Stringer

Participants on March 15 DFO trip to Chatfield
State Park pause to pose along trail near Plum
Creek. Highlights: returning swallows (Tree and
Cliff), Mountain Bluebird, Horned Larks, Bald
Eagles, and a low flyover by a Sandhill Crane
(David Suddjian)



Continued on page 44

MARCH 15

Walden Ponds / Sawhill Ponds (Boulder)

Leader

Laura Steadman and Donna Stumpp

Participants

Melody Serra, Christie Owens, Lynn Slaga, Jim Petri,
Karen Hawley, David Shafer, Melissa Mezger

Participants on March 15 trip to Walden Ponds Wildlife Habitat and Sawhill Ponds stroll along boardwalk. Outing began with a coffeeshop tutorial on using eBird bar charts for better trip planning. Highlights included a Common Raven flying by with nesting material
(Melody Serra)



MARCH 21

Bear Creek Greenbelt, Lakewood (Jefferson)

Leader

Anne Craig

Participants

David Suddjian, Sofia Prado-Irwin, Jenny Germano,
Virginia Gulakowski, Donny Dixon, Tanya Gelster,
Shumel and Amy Korengut, Hanna Supanich-Winter

Birders focus raptly on Great Horned Owls and week-old owlets on a short March 21 evening field trip to the Bear Creek Greenbelt in Lakewood. Two different nests also attracted interest from passersby on the trail, with whom the DFO shared scope views
(David Suddjian)



MARCH 21

Aurora Reservoir (Arapahoe)

Leader

Cynthia Cestkowski

Participants

Sharon Tinianow, Catherine and Kevin Millard,
Jodi Haller, John Tentler, David Suddjian,
Christopher Keefe, Ryan Corda, Robin Trevillian

Pausing for an impromptu group shot during March 21 field trip to Aurora Reservoir. Besides a photogenic Common Goldeneye X Bufflehead hybrid, the birders saw Cinnamon and Blue-winged teal and mating pairs of Bufflehead and American Kestrels
(Cynthia Cestkowski)



Continued on page 45



MARCH 23

Cherry Creek State Park (Arapahoe)

Leaders

David Suddjian

Participants

Lynn Slaga, Victoria Miles, Ryan Corda,
Leanne McDorman, Melody Serra,
Kathy Johnson, Scott Hammel,
Kathleen Bahr, Virginia Gulakowski

Field trippers march to Pelican Point on
March 23 field trip to Chatfield State Park
(Melody Serra)

MARCH 29

Prospect Park / Wheat Ridge Greenbelt (Jefferson)

Leaders

Cassandra Stroud and David Suddjian

Participants

Patricia Kuzma Sell, Cheryl Ames, Kris Tita, Dave Prentice,
Alice Tariot, Andrea Duran, Kelsey Robb, Lynn Slaga

Birders on the March 29 outing to Prospect Park and Wheat Ridge Greenbelt took advantage of a 3-hour window of sunshine between bursts of rain. Cedar Waxwings, a shy Marsh Wren, a Horned Grebe, and Bushtits gathering nesting material were highlights of Cassandra Stroud's first outing as a DFO field trip leader
(Dave Prentice)



MARCH 30

South Valley Park, Littleton (Jefferson)

Leaders

David Suddjian

Participants

Sarah Feigelson, Timothy Condon, Eileen Warner,
Zak Hepler, Kathy Holland, Coreen Spellman Bailey,
Ryan Corda, Jodi Haller, Michelle Verostko

Birders pose March 30 in South Valley Park on special field trip co-sponsored by DFO and Denver Audubon, a new partnership the clubs have begun with more trips scheduled. On a cool, cloudy morning, participants saw six species of raptors and gobs of Mountain and Western bluebirds
(Kathy Holland)

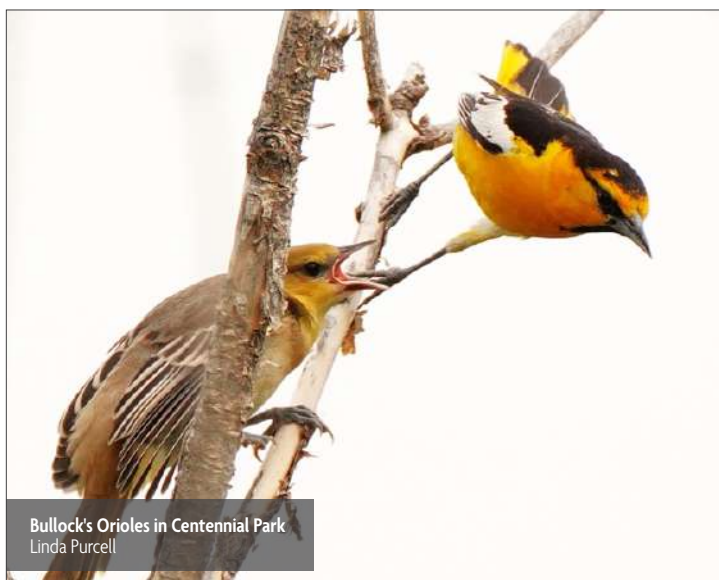


LAST WORD, LAST LOOK: URBAN BIRDING

Gritty gems: birding between the rocks and hard places of industrial Denver



Western Meadowlark perched on razorwire
on border of Centennial Park in Englewood
Melody Serra



Bullock's Orioles in Centennial Park
Linda Purcell



DFO field trip birders walk razor-wired
fence line in Centennial Park
Melody Serra

Linda Purcell

The first time I went birding at [Centennial Park](#), I was struck by how un-parklike it is. Wedged along the industrial south border of Denver between Federal Boulevard and the South Platte River, it's a gritty, razor-wired, urban backyard. Somehow, more than 200 species of birds know all about it — but many metro Denver birders don't.

Recently renovated by the City of Englewood, it does have “people park” features: picnic pavilions, playground, ballfields, restrooms, paved footpaths. But for birders, it has something else — ruggedly unattractive yet bird-friendly habitat. Scattered trees ring the unremarkable lake. Vegetation is generally overgrown. Low hillsides are weathered. An oxbow amputated from the river pokes in from the east.

Centennial Park is an uncut birding gem in an aggregate neighborhood of mechanical, contracting, storage, waste, recycling and other heavy commerce. But over time and more than 100 visits, it has wormed its way into my heart. Built atop a reclaimed landfill beneath high-voltage transmission lines, it is surprisingly peaceful, with few people and lots of birds (118 species on my eBird list). It's my kind of birding: You dig for everyday treasures where you wouldn't expect to find them — until you do.

Although my “patch” is not exactly invisible, it's not well-known, either. As an [eBird hotspot](#), it's easy to find and navigate. But Centennial Park requires exploration to understand why 203 species have been found there. The South Platte, the park lake and that oxbow pond in between creates a mosaic of habitats and conditions favorable for birds year-round: food, water, shelter, and nesting opportunities.

Somewhere around my 50th checklist there, curiosity got me wondering: This can't be the only scruffy bird magnet in metro Denver. What other under-birded urban spots deserve a boost onto DFO's roster of marquee field trips? An explorer by nature, I decided to go looking for overlooked locations, some known, others not. As a group, the places I found tend toward sketchy and ungroomed — and they are all the more inviting because of it.

After all, we live in a rather densely developed, sprawling cityscape. But beyond our own backyards and favorite birding destinations farther afield, what do we miss that's right around us? When I looked more closely, I noticed pockets of hidden habitat that birds see and use. I found places new to me without much effort.

Consider — or perhaps reconsider — these more than half a dozen spots and hotspots. There are contamination-adjacent havens like Denver's Heron Pond Natural Area and the York Street-to-I-270 stretch of the South Platte River beside Commerce City's smelly Suncor petroplex. Some, like Adams County's little-visited Lowell Ponds Open Space, are within an easy walk of better-known hotspots. In this case, the better-known is Arvada's Clear Creek Valley Park, itself a Jekyll-and-Hyde combination of tidy city park and unkempt waste ponds just off I-76. Still others, you may already know and perhaps have even birded.

Continued on page 48

These pockets epitomize “industrial birding” to me: rough-edged destinations that offer field experiences different from but no less satisfying than popular and classic out-of-town haunts along the Front Range. At each, I was able to record a decent checklist of species in two hours or less at a typical birding pace.

I defined my survey by poring over printed maps and satellite views of the metro area. From the start, I eliminated places with or near these characteristics:

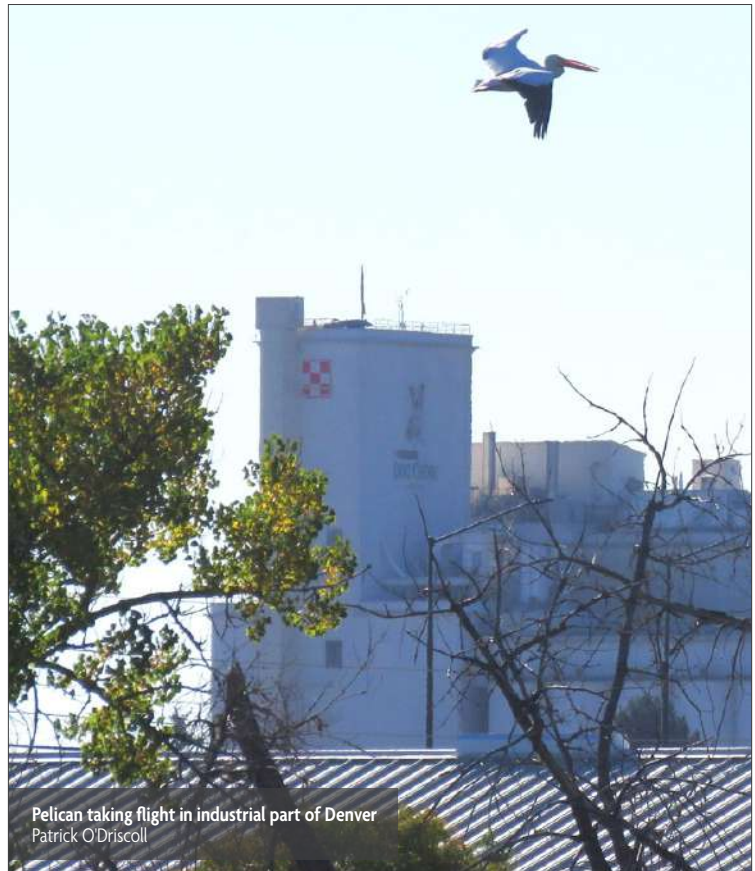
- Large “greenbelt” housing developments
- Big-box industrial and warehouse sites with scattered tree islands and acres of pavement
- Highly groomed areas, including heavy-traffic parks and tightly trimmed gardens
- Limited or no open water year-round

What drew me were places with these attributes:

- Resistant to development, undesirable for construction
- Not zoned for planned development, e.g., natural pockets, ignored or overlooked, in the middle of urbanscapes
- Year-round water, but sketchy — ditches, gullies, puddles and pits, wetland sumps, backwater stretches of urban creeks
- Diverse, overgrown vegetation — riparian, conifer, scrub and brush, berry bushes, leaf piles, sprouting trees, patches of grass and weeds
- Big enough (15-40 acres of connected, diverse habitat) for at least two hours of varied birding
- Room to park, and a circular route of path-trail-road (bushwhacking optional)
- Urban “gray areas” — backyards to industry, near or even bounded by better-known hotspots

Here’s what I settled upon (after Centennial), starting with locations generally near the South Platte River corridor and working outward from there.

Continued on page 45



Pelican taking flight in industrial part of Denver
Patrick O'Driscoll



The author scouting industrial stretch of
Clear Creek in Lowell Ponds Open Space
Patrick O'Driscoll

South Platte River – York St to I-270 (Adams County)

Not 10 minutes' drive from downtown Denver, this [under-visited eBird hotspot](#) is in the shadow of the metro area's largest industrial complex, the Suncor Energy USA refinery. Think of this area as 58th to I-270, along York Street. Like the most urbanized stretches of the river, it lacks the charm and excitement of busier downstream hotspots farther north in Adams (and upstream points far south in Arapahoe, Douglas and Jefferson). But it offers interesting sightings and loads of riverside potential on a two-hour excursion.

Moving north/downstream but before the South Platte's confluence with Sand Creek and I-270, the warm waterfall gushing out of metro Denver's main wastewater treatment plant attracts bountiful waterfowl. It's also one of the best spots in greater Denver to see Black-crowned Night Herons in winter (16 on a recent DFO field trip!). Where Sand Creek enters farther downstream, it creates a nice sandbar, too. South of 64th Avenue, heavy old cottonwoods lean out over the east bank, a seasonal spot for Wood Ducks. In early spring last year, I watched Bushtits build a nest at the riverbank.

The mostly paved, out-and-back trail attracts many bicyclists but few pedestrians. Raptors are present year-round. One thrilling episode: A Red-tailed Hawk with a squirming snake in its mouth flew just over my head to its nest on idle construction equipment nearby. I park at a large dirt area at 64th or somewhere along York Street.

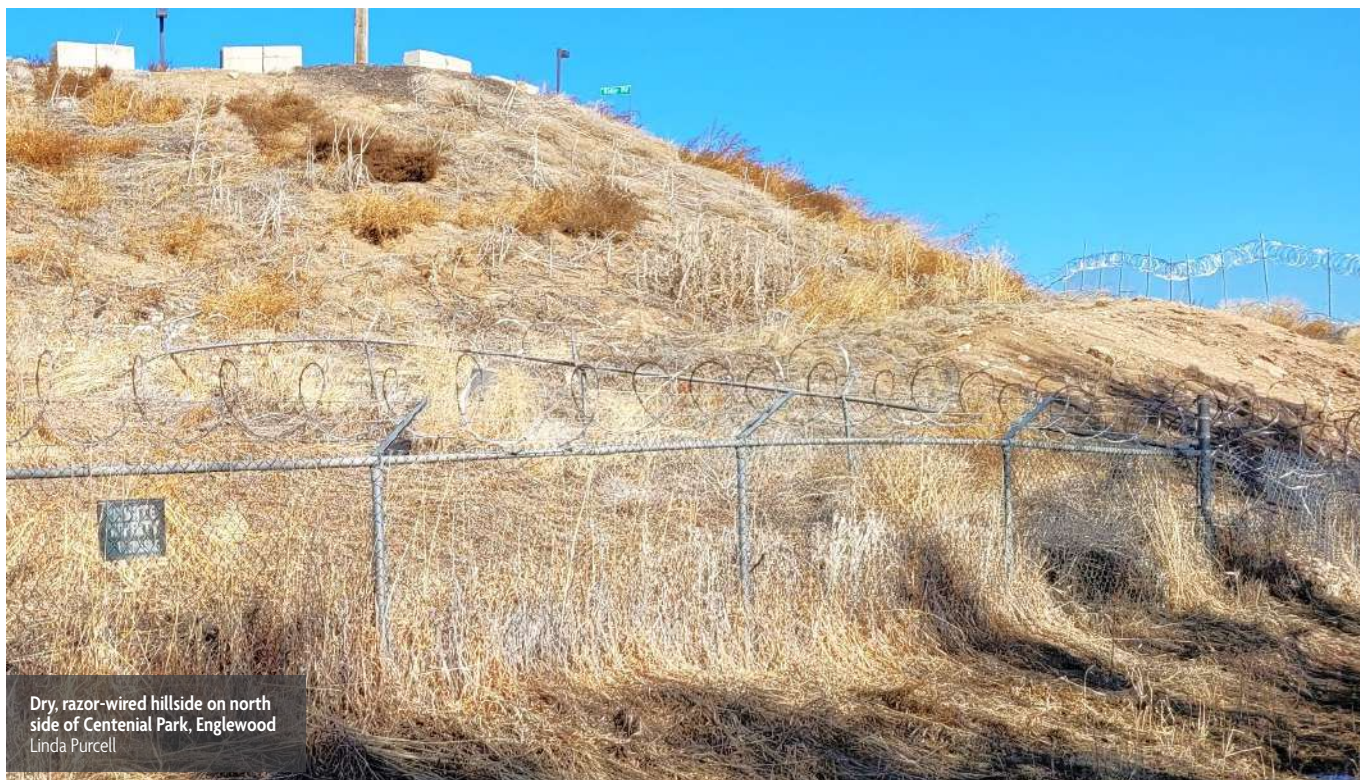
eBird data

101 species on 87 checklists (since 1989). I am surprised the area has had virtually no observations between June and August since the year 2008, though species before and after are varied and numerous. It's highly likely that this stretch of path and river supports more unreported species

Takeaway

Ignore the industrial setting and enjoy the birds in one of the least birded stretches of the South Platte in all of metro Denver

Continued on page 50



Dry, razor-wired hillside on north side of Centennial Park, Englewood
Linda Purcell

64th Avenue & South Platte (Adams)

An adjacent, overlapping hotspot, [64th & South Platte](#), has similar data with even fewer checklists, fewer birds reported, and minimal summer observations. Like York-to-I-270, this area is heavily overgrown with vegetation along the opposite bank of the river. Where present, the bike/pedestrian path on the west side provides good visibility downstream.

This is a shorter stop. In about 45 minutes, I bird south/upstream from 64th to 58th avenues and check out the tangle of vegetation and low water under the 58th Avenue bridge. Parking isn't allowed at the Metro Water Recovery entrance, but south end parking is a dirt patch at 58th and York that accommodates a couple of cars. I also park along York St. between 58th and 64th, walking along the road and bushwacking. This sounds more complicated than it is, although an initial drive-by is essential. Consider going to this scruffy area on a weekend for less noise and traffic.

eBird data

66 species on 59 checklists (since 1994). Remarkably, only one eBirder has visited this hotspot more than twice (he went three times), and only seven others have visited twice. By contrast, the adjacent hotspot downstream ([South Platte River – Sand Creek mouth](#)) has recorded almost twice as many species on six times as many checklists

Takeaway

Definitely under-birded, but full of possibility. Roadside parking can be dodgy, as can the neighborhood, so do a drive-by before you commit to birding this heavily industrial stretch of the South Platte

Heron Pond Natural Area (Denver)

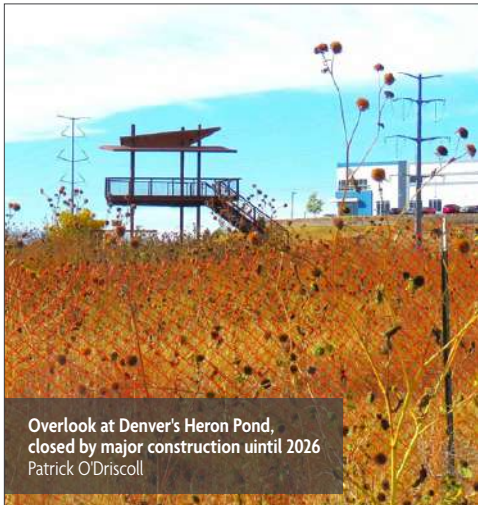
I had intended to start the list with this truly hidden gem. But since last spring (May 2024), [Heron Pond Natural Area](#) (also called Heron Pond Open Space) has been locked behind tall construction fencing. Major park transformation work from the pond south to the South Platte will continue at least into 2026.

The pond itself will survive Denver Parks & Recreation's [major facelift](#) to much of the 80-acre former brownfields site. In the meantime, a few determined birders continue to visit around the edges, aiming binoculars and cameras through the chain link barrier. Construction or not, the birds are still there. They love it (almost 200 eBird species).

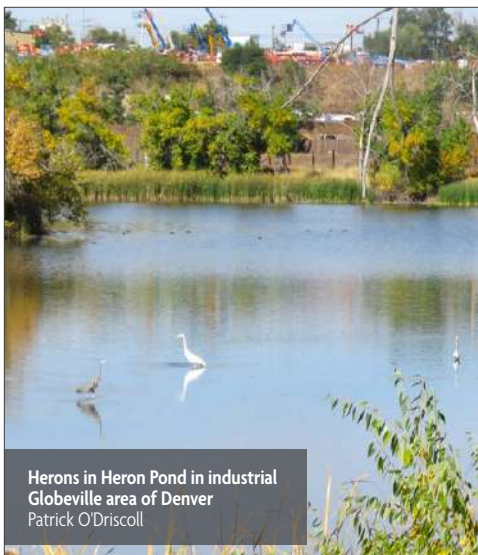
This patch of iffy water, scraggly woods and weedy fields just blocks north of downtown is a gritty part of the city's industrial history. Across the river from the National Western Stock Show grounds and historic Riverside Cemetery, it is surrounded by recycling, junk, metals and truck yards. For a century the



Construction zone at Heron Pond Natural Area in Denver
Patrick O'Driscoll



Overlook at Denver's Heron Pond,
closed by major construction until 2026
Patrick O'Driscoll



Hérons in Heron Pond in industrial
Globeville area of Denver
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 51

pond lay within view of the Globe Plant, Asarco Inc.'s defunct heavy-metals smelter and Superfund cleanup site in working-class Globeville, where Interstates 25 and 70 meet.

A playground and other park amenities are due next year. Already built but not yet open are a new wetland, paved walks, landscaped areas and parking lots. An observation tower in the northwest corner provides a sweeping view of the pond, "Heller Open Space" acreage and retooled Carpio-Sanguinette Park, a 13-acre, riverside "pocket" on the ruins of an old sewage plant.

All this signals a decidedly "neighborhood park" emphasis when it reopens. But the pond itself will remain a bird sanctuary, perhaps defiantly so. Shallow and lined with cattails, cottonwoods and brush, it is still the main attraction for waterfowl and waders, including four kinds of herons and egrets.

Part of Heron Pond's appeal to me is how isolated it is from other bodies of water on the map. Scruffy but pleasant, it has that off-the-radar feel — relatively quiet beyond the local truck traffic. In spring and fall, warblers and other migrants join the waterbirds and year-round species.

eBird data

194 species on 1,198 checklists (since 1973). Although visited by 314 eBirders, one-quarter of those list-visits are by just 10 top birders. The 10th highest birder has 86 species

Takeaway

Not undiscovered, but certainly under-birded. Once Heron Pond Natural Area reopens in 2026, it will be worthy of repeated visits. For now, check it out through the fence

From those pockets along the South Platte, I followed the map west along a thin blue line that defies the urban grids crisscrossing it. Clear Creek begins at the Continental Divide near Loveland Pass and descends, wild and unobstructed, to the Front Range plains. Its sinuous path winds through Golden, Lakewood and Wheat Ridge, then roughly along Interstate 76 until it joins the South Platte in southeast Thornton.

Studying that map and scouting by car, I explored the largely ignored stream and undeveloped floodplain between Federal and Sheridan boulevards, with combinations of creek and

lakes, open space, and wildlife areas. Within that patchwork of white, green and blue on the terrain map, I focused on these creekside locations.

Clear Creek Valley Park (Arvada)

Visible below from westbound traffic on Interstate 76, this 80-acre expanse between Tennyson Street and Lowell Boulevard north of the freeway is a hidden jewel in plain sight. It's an unexpected mix of public park amenities on the north side (grass fields, pickleball courts, playground, urban gardens, trails, fishing pond) and a rough-edged tract of open space on the south. Amazingly, [Clear Creek Valley Park](#) has recorded nearly 200 eBird species.

The first time I visited this [Hyland Hills Park and Recreation District site](#), I was immediately drawn (and still am) to that unkempt swath of what the district calls "wildlife viewing ponds." To the non-birder, the three ponds are unwelcoming as they push up against the uncut-scrub slope of I-76, something of a habitat buffer. The ponds attract wading birds from egrets and herons to avocets and even, eight years ago, a White Ibis. Ephemeral Islands and peninsulas in these shallows provide nesting habitat for shorebirds, including American Avocet. The park's fishing pond (formerly a gravel pit) also draws waders (Great Egret, Western Cattle-Egret). The birding's even good in winter: In early February, with very little open water and the temperature near freezing, I still managed to see 18 species.

eBird data

197 species recorded on 1,056 checklists (since 2001) by 313 eBirders. Breaking this down, the top checklist leader (193 lists) has recorded 191 species

Takeaway

Reachable off the interstate, with plentiful parking and easy access to the pond habitats south of the developed park

Lowell Ponds Open Space (Adams)

I suspect this eBird hotspot hasn't gained traction beyond a very local and fortunate few because it used to be one of Colorado's State Wildlife Areas, which were once managed solely for wildlife and "wildlife recreation" (hunting and fishing). At some point Adams County assumed management of what

Continued on page 52

is now [Lowell Ponds Open Space](#) (though its old SWA name lingers on some obsolete maps and non-updated internet pages).

Although barely a 5-minute walk south from Clear Creek Valley Park, the open space feels somewhere else entirely. Interstate 76 is a raised and noisy buffer between the two. The ponds' strip of trees, water and grass lies low in the Clear Creek floodplain, tucked south of the freeway between Lowell Boulevard and Tennyson Street, four blocks from the Denver city limits.

It takes a couple of visits to figure out how best to experience Lowell Ponds. There's parking on both sides of Lowell, but entry is southwest of the boulevard bridge over the creek. The bike path there, along the south bank, is an obvious out-and-back route. But I find it birdier and more interesting to cross the bridge (safe pedestrian walkway), then dip down another path between the north bank of the creek and the main ponds for a loop walk. From the bridge, the breadth of the creek's still-intact floodplain is a thrilling remnant of natural history to this urban birder.

Down on the ground, the views and access to the creek are better, too. There are even a couple of well-worn viewing platforms with picnic tables. Visible through the creekside cottonwoods are reminders that it's still an industrial setting: graffitied walls on nondescript commercial buildings, a construction truck yard, concrete rubble rapids in the creek, and electrical transmission towers overhead.

Once Tennyson comes into view on the west side, loop back around the open ponds. As you explore the thickets and gulleys for birds, follow the trail (with its curious remnants of long-ago pavement and sidewalk) below I-76 and back to the bridge crossing.

eBird data

188 recorded species, 2,255 checklists (since 1972) by 285 eBirders. This is where the stats reveal Lowell Ponds' diamond-in-the-rough story. More than 75% of those checklists belong to just three regular birders, and the top species leader has recorded 169 of those species

Takeaway

So many lists and species by so few birders! Lowell Ponds is a wide open birding book for the rest of us, smack in the middle of town

Continued on page 53



Great Egret at Clear Creek Valley Park, Arvada
Linda Purcell



Wetland ponds at Clear Creek Valley Park in winter
Linda Purcell



American Pipit in Creekside Park, Wheat Ridge
Linda Purcell

Creekside Park (Wheat Ridge)

Still basking in the glow of a Lowell Ponds walk and with 30 minutes to spare, why not explore one more target site on Clear Creek? I headed just a couple of miles west on I-76 to Creekside Park in Wheat Ridge (North Marshall Street and West 49th Avenue). On the eBird map, it looks like a dead zone: a non-hotspot wedged in a triangle between I-70 and I-76, surrounded by industry (several HVAC companies, self-storage complex, concrete contractors, cannabis outlet, and a sprawling demolition-excavation-materials recycling yard across the creek).

But this modest patch of baseball diamonds and grass is for the birds because . . . well, it is *creekside*. A jogger who stopped to chat on the path along the stream raved about the birds on that stretch of Clear Creek. It turns out Wheat Ridge is making efforts to re-establish native vegetation in the area to support bird habitat. Learning that was a nice surprise — and then I spotted an American Pipit! I'll definitely be going back for more surprises at this under-the-radar spot.

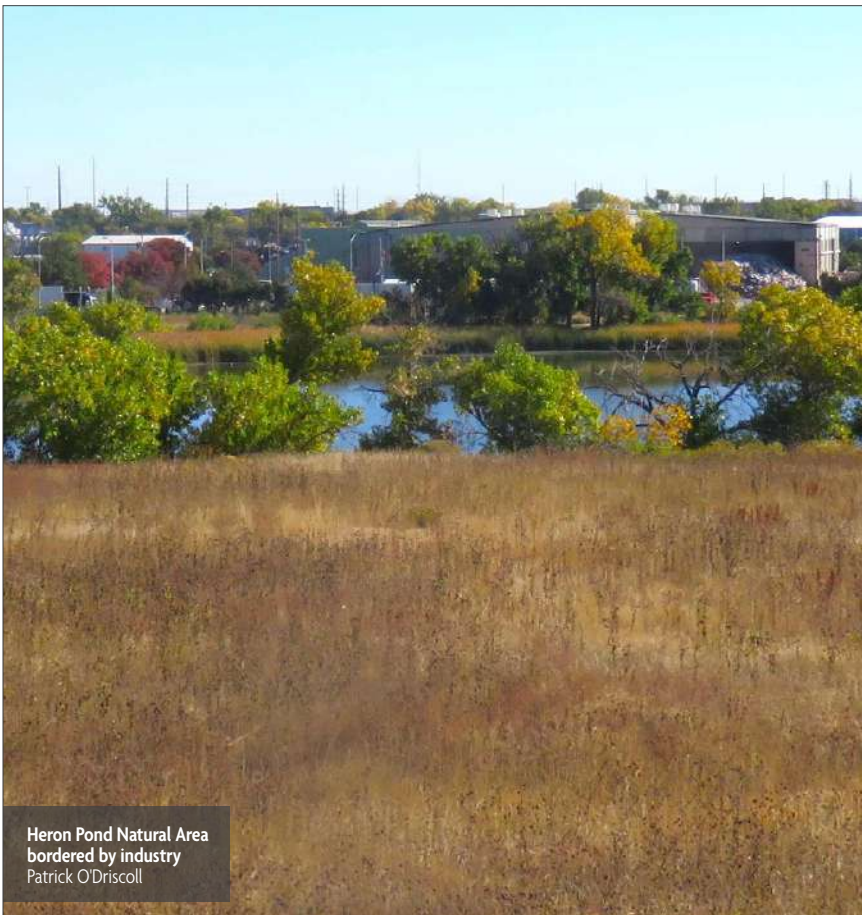
Inspiration Point Park (Denver)

If you visit Creekside Park, it's only a 5-minute drive or a 20-minute walk east to this unusual hotspot on a wooded hillside barely inside the Denver City limits. [Inspiration Point Park](#) is a narrow, 5-blocks-long strip with perhaps the only grove of Ponderosa pines for miles around. Those trees, and remnant patches of foothills shrub habitat on the edges of this neighborhood greenspace, are the chief attractions for

Continued on page 54



American Kestrel in Lowell Ponds
Open Space, Adams County
Patrick O'Driscoll



Heron Pond Natural Area
bordered by industry
Patrick O'Driscoll

the birds. Although the park lacks its own water source, Clear Creek itself is just a short flight downhill for thirsty birds.

Aptly named, this 25-acre park tapers west along its narrow hilltop (elevation: 5,415 feet) to a singular point for postcard sunset views of the Rockies — and a bird's eye view of the spaghetti tangle of lanes and ramps where I-76 and I-70 meet/split far below. Inspiration Point's island-in-the-sky location makes for excellent flyover birding, from waterfowl flocks to raptors. There are hummingbirds, too.

eBird data

114 species on 267 checklists (since 2014) by 64 eBirders. Although I have not visited this park yet, my editor vouches for its surprising diversity: migrant warblers in fall (Townsend's, Wilson's), foothills shrub species (scrub-jays, towhees, thrashers), conifer songbirds (nuthatches, Bushtits, creepers, Mountain Chickadees) and more

Takeaway

Exceptional range of species for such a small, isolated and under-birded patch of unexpected habitat. Why should just 64 other eBirders have all the fun?

Those are my suggestions for new or overlooked industrial birding hotspots to try in 2025. (Keep an eye out for future DFO field trips to some of these, too!) How about your favorite urbanized birdspots? Let's share.

In closing, I'll touch on a couple of places that were once as scruffy and overlooked in their time as these ones are now.

Nearly 40 years ago, the Rocky Mountain Arsenal chemical weapons plant was a Superfund cleanup site. A decade and a half later, it opened to the public in 2004 as [Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge](#). Since then, eBirders have filed more than 24,000 checklists from 14 different Arsenal hotspots, making it one of the top destinations in Colorado.

For 60 years, Bluff Lake was an end-of-runway, crash-safety buffer zone at Denver's Stapleton airport until Denver International opened in 1995. The more than 6,300 eBird checklists filed since then at [Bluff Lake Nature Center](#) make it the most visited eBird destination within the Denver city limits.

If the popularity of such hotspots is any indication, other industrial and commercial places and previously ignored or overlooked urban patches can also rise to increased (or renewed) acclaim. Here's to future birding enjoyment and appreciation in every corner of metro Denver, especially in industrialized places where birds manage to survive — and even thrive.

*A DFO member since 2021, **Linda Purcell** has been observing birds and taking photographs all her life. A southwestern Colorado native, she has lived in Denver since 1989. She retired in 2020.*

Sources and Resources

General

- [Denver Field Ornithologists](#)
- [Bodies of Water \(Wikipedia\)](#)
- [Colorado Birding Trail](#)

Heron Pond

- [Globeville's Heron Pond is Getting a Facelift \(Colorado Community Media\)](#)
- [Heron Pond/Carpio-Sanguinette Parks \(The Greenway Foundation\)](#)

Clear Creek

- [Evolution of the Landscape along the Clear Creek Corridor, Colorado—Urbanization, Aggregate Mining, and Reclamation \(USGS\)](#)
- [Clear Creek Colorado \(Wikipedia\)](#)

Checklists and data

- [ebird \(Cornell lab\)](#)

Rocky Mountain Arsenal

- [Superfund Site: Rocky Mountain Arsenal \(EPA\)](#)
- [Rocky Mountain Arsenal \(CDPHE\)](#)

Bluff Lake

- [Bluff Lake @ 30: from airport crash zone to bird-rich nature preserve \(The Lark Bunting November 2024, page 16\)](#)



BACKstory: Who's the predator?

I took this photo March 22 at Cherry Creek State Park's Prairie Loop. **Winston Liu** and I were looking for a better view of the Glaucous-winged Gull that had been reported at Pelican Point when we noticed the Ring-billed Gull commotion.

We thought one of them had caught a crayfish and the rest were chasing after it. Not until later, looking at the photos on my computer at home, did I see the momentary reversal of predator-prey roles.

The crayfish was not locked in the gull's bill. Rather, it dangled from the bird's breast, holding on for its shellfish life with a pincer-full of feathers.

— **Dave Prentice**

Ring-billed Gulls with crayfish, Cherry Creek SP, March 22, 2025
Dave Prentice



THE LARK BUNTING

QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 61 | ISSUE 3 | JULY 2025

DFOBIRDS.ORG

FALL PROGRAMS

In-person with Mr. eBird
at DFO's birthday party!

PAGE 11

DFO @ 90 HISTORY, PART 3

1980-2000: Club's golden
era as 21st century nears

PAGES 14-20

DFO PEOPLE

7 months gone, the bird
art of Joe Chen is back

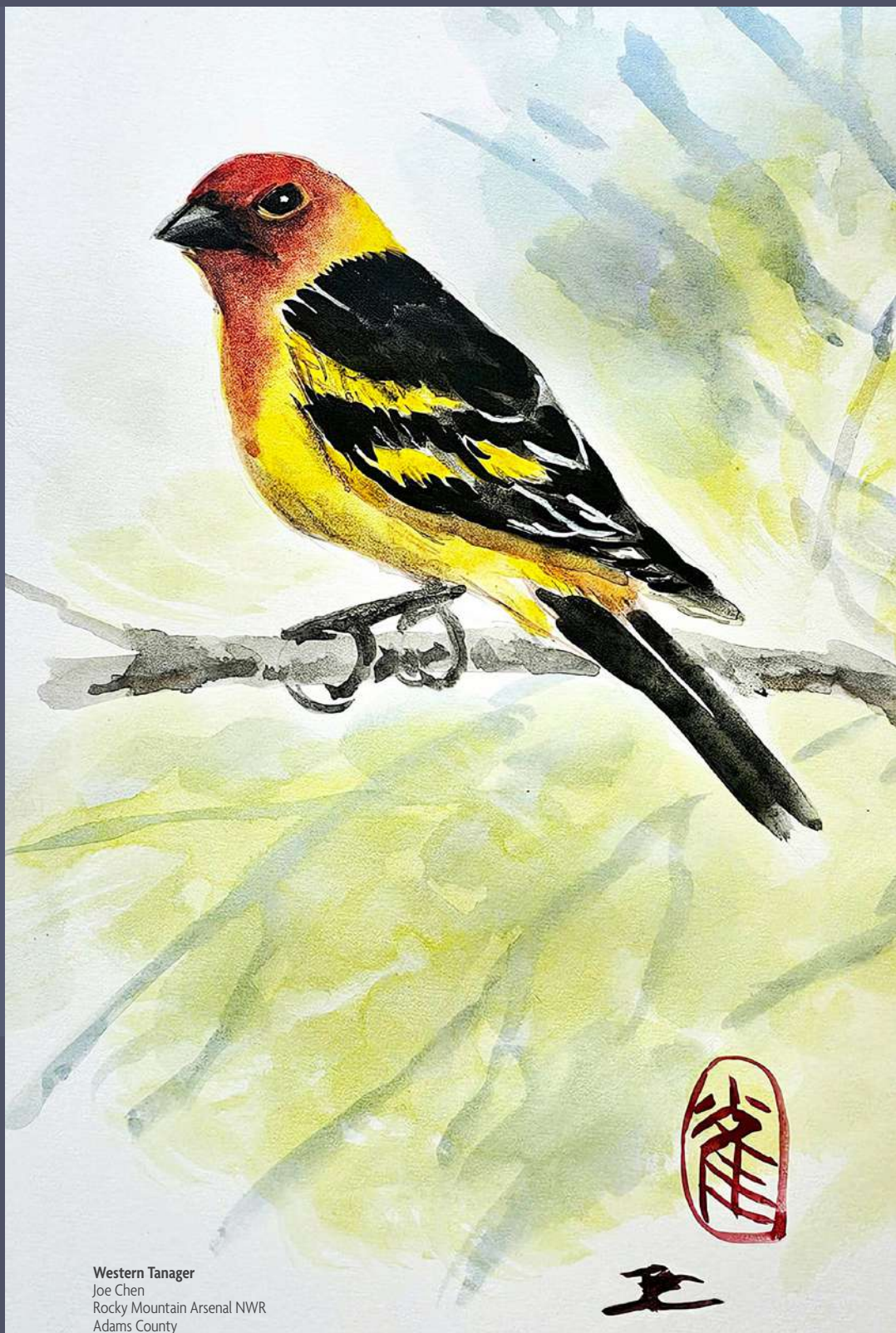
PAGES 27-29

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Another sky-high DFO trip
in SE AZ's "Sky Islands"

PAGE 51-60

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS
90th Anniversary



Western Tanager
Joe Chen
Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
Adams County



ON THE COVER

Western Tanager: Fiery sign of summer across Colorado

Patrick O'Driscoll

After months of gray, subdued winter birds and birding, those first spring-migration glimpses of color on the wing shock your system, don't they? I'm not sure there's a better spring jolt to be had than from the season's first Western Tanager male. What a creature to behold.

That flaming red head. The squint-inducing bright yellow torso. The coal-black back and tail. The dark wings slashed with two bold wing bars, yellow above and white below. It's a lit torch in a tree — and an extra *ba-dump* in your chest when you spot one.

DFO member and painter **Joe Chen** found the one on the cover of this issue of *The Lark Bunting* in late April in Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. For the moment, most Western Tanagers on Colorado's eastern Plains have come and gone — but not far. If you're in the western two-thirds of the state, they nest among you. Western Tanagers seemed to pop up everywhere last month on Western Slope

field trips at the Colorado Field Ornithologists convention in Grand Junction. A signal summer forest species of this half of the US, it occurs broadly across the region's open coniferous woodlands, especially in Douglas firs.

Western Tanager is a restless species that calls no one place home year-round. It ranges farther north than any other American tanager. After wintering in Mexico and parts of Central America, its estimated 15 million breeding birds migrate north through several states, including eastern Colorado. Some of them lay eggs and rear young as far north as Canada's Northwest Territories.

Despite the flashy plumage, Western Tanagers are not conspicuous dandies. Their low-key ways include staying largely out of sight in the shade of trees, especially evergreens. On a DFO field trip in Denver City Park in May, we got sore necks looking at a colorful male high up and inside a tall spruce. He stayed in and around that tree at least three days before moving on, presumably to pursue a mate. If so, he would stake his territory with nonstop singing along the borders. Once mated, both birds would chase off intruders, and the male would stay around at least through egg-laying.

Western Tanagers are stocky, stout-billed and methodical foragers, plucking bugs and other food as they move through the upper limbs of trees and shrubs. But they can fly swiftly. On occasion, they even sally forth and back from tree limbs, flycatcher-style, to catch prey in midair.

Scientifically, much remains unknown about the species. One of the few aspects that researchers have delved into is pigmentation — specifically, the dietary source of pigment that makes male Western Tanagers' head feathers so red.

Unlike its three closest tanager cousins (Scarlet, Summer and Hepatic) and an array of other red-colored species, the Western gets its pigmentation not from the oxo-carotenoids that account for their coloration, but from a rarer pigment called *rhodoxanthin*. It is thought to originate in insects that Western Tanagers eat (their primary diet in breeding season). The insects presumably acquire the pigment from plants.



Joe Chen learned Chinese ink painting in middle school but didn't take up birding until after college in his native Taiwan. A project

design engineer in the computer field, he moved to Denver in 1999, joined DFO in 2018, and retired in 2022.

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of The Lark Bunting since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he joined DFO in 2014, became a field trip leader in 2016, and leads occasional trips in Denver City Park and other local destinations,



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
Western Tanager: Fiery sign of summer across Colorado
- 5 From DFO's Perch**
Summertime: When better to enliven your birding with new info, skills, views?
- 7 DFO News Notes**
- 9 Fall Program Previews**
- 14 DFO @90, Part 3**
1980s-2000: Golden times for DFO, confident as the 21st century beckoned
- 27 DFO People**
Home again: the bright, charming birds of Joe Chen's brush and pen
- 31 The Lives of Birds**
Day-sleeping masters of camouflage, nightjars are more heard than seen
- 34 Field Trips in Focus**
- 51 Last Word, Last Look**
Third time, more charms: Late migration in drought stirs birding magic in "Sky Islands"

The Lark Bunting, formerly the monthly newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists, is the club's quarterly journal and is published online in January, April, July and October.

DFO On the Wing, the club's digital newsletter, is emailed monthly to all members.

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Submit original journal articles, essays, photographs and story ideas to *The Lark Bunting* quarterly journal's editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Submit time-sensitive, month-to-month news items, tips, announcements, photos and other materials to the monthly newsletter's editor at comm@dfobirds.org.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.



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**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

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FROM DFO'S PERCH

Summertime: When better to enliven *your* birding with new info, skills, views?

Editor's note: For years *The Lark Bunting* has published *From the President*, a regular message from DFO's top officer. Recently re-elected to a third term, DFO president **Sharon Tinianow** is taking the year to focus on other critical club tasks. With this issue, we'll fill this space with **From DFO's Perch**, a similar quarterly message. Sitting in on *The Perch* this month is longtime DFO member **Mary Geder**, who also chairs the club's Nominations Committee

Mary Geder

Now that the pace and excitement of spring birding are subsiding, we can all settle into the less hectic tempo of summer birding. The birds we seek aren't on the move much now (but wait 'til August!). They are busy nesting, rearing and fledging their young. And that gives us the opportunity to chase them less and observe them more intensely.

In my own birding past, I've found that the usual strategy for summertime birding boils down to two things:

- Head for higher, cooler elevations, where many species have gone to breed
- Bird very early in the day, or else later, towards evening

Both are sensible guides, but unless you're retired or infinitely flexible with work, transportation options and your schedule, they won't work for everyone. I think summer is a great time to consider broadening your birding dimensions. Here are a few ideas:

- **Investigate bird behaviors.** Summer birding is a chance to delve deeper into the ways that birds behave. This is for *every* birder, not just beginners or even experts. If you "chase" reports of rare species, what better time to learn more about your target's behavior? The more you know, the better your chances of spotting the bird. And how about those many (choose your adjective) unusual, odd, weird and just plain interesting bird quirks? For instance: What's the deal with that rumba-like walk of the American Woodcock, that butt-bobbing by Spotted Sandpipers, or why all those blackbirds, magpies and jays mob and dive-bomb every passing hawk? One more: Where do birds sleep? We sometimes learn about or even check out communal roosts of crows, starlings or grackles, but what about common passerines? Where do they lay their heads, so to speak, and why there? Have you ever sought out birds that may be sleeping near you? And what about knowing which juvenile birds help their parents rear a nest full of chicks?
- **Learn more about your favorite species or bird family.** Do you really know *everything* about that spark bird or fave species? This will only be rewarding: The subject birds already interest you deeply. Knowing more about their preferred habitats, when to expect them (seasonal arrival and departure dates), their ranges and elevations, what they like to eat, how they nest and their breeding biology — all these enrich the connection to "your" bird. Loads of online sources await your search and research, from eBird and online field guides to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's encyclopedic [Birds of the World](#) species database. Spend a few air conditioned hours at this in the dog days of July and August and craft your own fresh species profiles. Amaze your birding friends with cool facts and hot factoids
- **Explore!** Whether out of habit or ease, we tend to frequent birdy places we discovered years ago, or that were mentioned by friends. They're safe and often predictable, although perhaps they'll harbor a known target bird or unexpected rarity from time to time. In between those highs, why not try someplace else truly new once a week or month? Discovering another bird spot to hang out is truly gratifying. Many people tell me they love doing this. For one

Continued on page 6

thing, you're finding it yourself. For another, you can share it with friends (or not!). It needn't be far away. Maybe it's an overlooked patch or part of an already known and heavily visited park. So, maybe you go early or late when there's no crowd. Searching for a new or additional favorite place is half the fun

- **Volunteer!** Helping out in groups, organizations or at places linked to your favorite pastime knows no season. As birding seasons change (like right now), it's a great time to consider volunteering. The commitment needn't be permanent or regular. You get to decide how much time you can contribute. Local and state parks, and bird-oriented clubs like DFO, CFO, and the various Audubon chapters, all can use specific, one-time help as well as longer-term commitments. Sign up for a Christmas Bird Count, or for the Denver area fall and spring counts pioneered decades ago by DFO members. (DFO vice president **Charlie Chase** coordinates those; contact him via the [DFO leadership messaging link](#)).
- **"Birding-adjacent" activities.** DFO has many very good photographers in the club ranks. How about working on a field guide to fledgling birds? I've never seen one myself. But young birds grow beyond fledglings fast and are often well-hidden during this phase. Starting a communal effort to find and photograph fledglings would be amazing — and the time to do it would be NOW



As you can see, there are many potential ways to engage, learn and add to our birding experience. And if you work on something here that isn't actual birding in the field, it'll *certainly* enhance field birding for everyone. So when it's 90 to 100 degrees or more this summer and the birds are all panting in the shade, come back to this and consider how you can reset your approach to the birds.

Happy summertime birding, everyone!

— **Mary**

Mary Geder took up birding in the 1990s and joined DFO in the early 2000s. She began work as a US Fish & Wildlife Service biologist before a 30-year career in the oil and gas field as a contracts administrator and systems analyst. Now retired, she lives in Lakewood

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.

NEXT ON BIRD BOMBS:

"SUMMER ID CHALLENGES" JULY 17

[Register now](#) for the next BIRD BOMBS mini-webinar episode, Summer ID Challenges, set for **Thursday, July 17 at 7 p.m.** via Zoom. BIRD BOMBS host and DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** will explore some of the perennial birding challenges of the summer months, including hummingbirds and more. You can also Visit the [BIRD BOMBS video library](#) on the DFO website to view any of the previous 37 episodes.



REGISTER FOR BIRD BOMBS

DFO ELECTS CLUB LEADERSHIP FOR 2025-26

President **Sharon Tinianow** was re-elected in April to a third term in Denver Field Ornithologists' annual election of officers and board members. DFO voters cast ballots via email and online during a two-week period in April. The club's three other officers were interim appointees who stood for election for the first time. **Charlie Chase**, appointed by the DFO Board to the vacant vice president's post in 2024, was elected to that office for the first time. So, too, board member **Patrick O'Driscoll**, appointed secretary in February, was elected to that post. DFO member **Tom Econopouly**, also appointed in February as

interim co-treasurer, was elected to replace treasurer **Kathy Holland** on her retirement from club duties.

Voters also filled four of DFO's board seats. Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** and Nominations chair **Mary Geder**, both members of the board, were re-elected to 3-year terms. DFO past President **Susan Blansett** and field trip leader **Gary Witt** were elected to the board seats being vacated by O'Driscoll and retiring member **Tina Jones**, also for 3-year terms.

FALL BIRD COUNT SET FOR 2ND WEEKEND IN SEPTEMBER

The annual Fall Bird Count is back for its 47th running, and DFO vice president **Charlie Chase** is overseeing it. He reports that this year's effort is set for several days around the second weekend in September. That means counts scheduled between **Friday, Sept. 12** and **Tuesday, Sept. 16**. The autumn tally and a similar count in spring were begun in the 1970s by DFO hands including **Hugh Kingery**, who continued to oversee it well into the 21st century.

"As part of this long-term citizen science monitoring program, we will count all the birds we can find in each of seven areas," Chase says. If you're interested in helping, email the individual count leader for any of the destinations listed below for more details, meet-up times, etc. Other questions? Send to Chase at charlesachase3@gmail.com.

- **Friday, Sept. 12** — Cherry Creek SP
Contact: **Cynthia Madsen**, cmadsen08@gmail.com
- **Saturday, Sept. 13** — Barr Lake SP
Chris Gilbert, chrisgee9@gmail.com
Charlie Chase, charlesachase3@gmail.com
- **Saturday, Sept. 13** — Chatfield SP
Joey Kellner, vireo1@comcast.net
- **Sunday, Sept. 14** — Castlewood Canyon SP
Dave Hill, davidhill2357@gmail.com
- **Sunday, Sept. 14** — Rocky Mountain Arsenal
Charlie Chase, charlesachase3@gmail.com
- **Monday, Sept. 15** — Bear Creek Lake Park
Mary Geder, mfg5000@live.com
- **Date TBA** — Audubon Kingery Nature Center and Roxborough Road
Bill Schreitz, flannelmoth@gmail.com

Continued on page 8

**CALENDAR ALERT:
COLO BIRDING
CHALLENGE
IS SEPTEMBER 6**



Colorado Field Ornithologists' 2025 fund-raising birdathon, the [Colorado Birding Challenge](#), will be one week earlier than last year's. That means more opportunities for teams to see more species in 24 hours in one or another of Colorado's 64 counties. This year's county-based challenge is **Saturday, Sept. 6**. ([Registration opens in mid-July on the CFO website](#)) Teams choose a county, give themselves a name, and collect donations from family and friends, often as pledged amounts for each species the team can checklist, to support CFO programs and conservation projects.

Twenty-six teams registered in 15 Colorado counties in 2024. The goal is to have at least one team competing in each of the state's counties. Organizers hope returning teams will choose to compete in less-birded counties to gather vital eBird data and expand the challenge's statewide footprint. Teams can enter in four categories:

- **Challenge** — Two or more birders, all out to ring up the highest number of species within their chosen county
- **Green Challenge** — Minimal carbon footprint with only non-motorized, self-propelled birding on foot, cycle, paddled boat, etc.
- **Under-25 Challenge** — Teams of young people, though adults are allowed to chaperone or drive for underage participants, and
- **BYOW, or Bird Your Own Way** — Non-competitive birding parties, solos, favorite hot spotters, even a "big sit".

In the competitive categories, team results are weighted by a "county par" calculation using eBird data so that participants in birdy and less birdy counties in the state compete on an equal footing. CFO also reports that Front Range Birding and Optics will sponsor the 2025 challenge, providing prizes to winning teams in the three competitive categories.

REGISTER FOR THE CHALLENGE

**CSU PROF IS AOS "MOST MERITORIOUS"
RESEARCHER**

Kristen Ruegg, associate professor of biology at Colorado State University and co-founder of the [Bird Genoscape Project](#), is the 2025 recipient of the William Brewster Memorial Award of the [American Ornithological Society](#). The award honors the author of "the most meritorious body of work on birds of the Western Hemisphere" published in the past 10 years. Ruegg uses feathers and powerful chemistry to investigate birds' migratory flyways. Her project, begun in 2009 with **Tom Smith** of UCLA, aims to map migration routes of at least 100 North American species with genomic tools. Her CSU lab focuses on forces that maintain species diversity in a changing world. Her work also assesses how bird populations need to adapt to climate change. In 2020, *National Geographic* produced a highly informative, 15-minute documentary on the genoscape project, [Feathers in Flight](#). Last November, Ruegg discussed the project in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's 2024 [Paul C. Munding Distinguished Lecture](#), the lab's most prestigious annual address.

**COMBINED WORLD CHECKLIST IS OUT:
11,131 SPECIES**

[AviList](#), the first combined directory of known bird species worldwide, was released in June. In the works since 2016, it represents a stable "consensus taxonomy" for all the birds of the world. This new downloadable species list/database blends the strengths of the three most popular previous global checklists: BirdLife Checklist, IOC World Bird List, and eBird/Clements Checklist. All three were previously updated once or twice a year; AviList will be updated annually and provide all key taxonomic and nomenclature information. In so doing, its creators bridged decades marked by confusion, different standards and conflicting decisions on some species. Updating independent and competing checklists previously amounted to much duplicated effort, and the three lists' committees were sometimes out of sync in timing and species conclusions.

AviList "version 2025" lists 11,131 species in its database, including species and subspecies that have gone extinct since about the year 1500. Users can [download the checklist spreadsheet](#) in both an "extended" version (25 column categories) and a "short" version (13 categories). The components range across taxonomy, subspecies, nomenclature, English names, linear sequence and other categories.

AviList
The Global Avian Checklist

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEWS

Two live, in-person presentations highlight DFO's fall program lineup!

Welcome back to a new season of DFO evening programs!

This fall, for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, DFO will host two of its four autumn evening programs in person, in September and October.

Mark your calendar now and don't miss these special presentations.

The Monday, September 29 program will feature longtime DFO field trip leader **Joey Kellner** and his popular spring migration excursions to southeastern Arizona's bird-rich "Sky Islands" region.

The Monday, October 13 program will feature DFO's most famous birding alumnus, eBird director **Chris Wood** of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (who as a Denver teenager was mentored by . . . Kellner himself!). Wood will speak on the occasion of DFO's 90th birthday.

Read on for more details about these in-person gatherings, as well as our two other fall programs, which will be Zoom webinar presentations. ►



10,000 Birds and (Still) Counting: One Man's Global Checklist

Peter Kaestner (world birder)

Monday, August 25, 2025

7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



The first person on earth to record 10,000 bird species will open DFO's fall-winter monthly program series for 2025. **Peter Kaestner**, a retired career US diplomat whose far-flung work travels helped him achieve this milestone, will recount his decades-long quest in "*10,000 Birds and (Still) Counting: One Man's Global Checklist*," scheduled for **Monday, Aug. 25** at **7 p.m. MDT** via Zoom webinar.

Kaestner reached the 10K species milestone on Feb. 9, 2024, when he spotted an [Orange-tufted Spiderhunter](#) in its native Philippines. He reached his 10,000th species only hours ahead of a rival lister. Kaestner has birded 190 countries and territories and lived in a dozen of them, from India and Afghanistan to Colombia, New Guinea and Namibia. In 2019, he became a part-time guide for Rockjumper, the birding outfitter service, which touts him as "the world's #1 birder." He also serves as a brand ambassador for the American Bird Conservancy.

In 1989, Kaestner discovered a new member of the antpitta family of small, shy, forest-dwelling ground birds of the Central and South American tropics. Avian authorities honored his finding of the [Cundinamarca Antpitta](#) by including his name in the species' Latin scientific designation, *Grallaria kaestneri*.

Kaestner earned his bachelor's degree in biology from Cornell University, where he was an ornithology teaching assistant. During his 36-year State Department career, he represented the US at conferences of CITES, the [Convention on International Trade in the Conservation of Wild Fauna and Flora](#). Upon retirement in 2016, he became a full-time birder to pursue the 10K record.



Joey Kellner and gopher
snake friend in Arizona
Kathy Mihm-Dunning

Trogons, Hummers, Roadrunners: Birding SE Arizona with DFO's “Sky Islands” Guru

Joey Kellner (birder, herpetologist, field tripper)

Monday, September 29, 2025

7 p.m. MDT

[Lowry Conference Center](#)

[1061 Akron Way, Denver 80230](#)

LOOK FOR REGISTRATION DETAILS IN UPCOMING
DFO ON THE WING MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

*NOTE: This program is on the **fifth Monday of the month** because the usual fourth Monday this September conflicts with the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah*

For the past three years, longtime DFO field trip leader, former club president and Ptarmigan Award recipient **Joey Kellner** has led a two-week spring field excursion to southeastern Arizona and its legendary “Sky Islands” birding habitats.

Each trip, seven lucky DFO birders (chosen by lottery) joined him for this mid-May immersion into a spring migration wonderland. Joey provided his fellow birders with numerous opportunities for “lifer” bird sightings, from Mexican Spotted Owls and Elegant Trogons to an array of hummingbirds and other rarities up from winter retreats south of the Mexico border. On the most recent trip this past May, the group checklisted 227 species!

In this live evening program Sept. 29 — DFO's first in-person monthly presentation since COVID-19 — Kellner will describe the magical destinations and scores of species encountered on his DFO expeditions into the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts.

Mark your calendar NOW for this special evening. Look for more details, including registration and venue information, in upcoming issues of the monthly *DFO On The Wing* email newsletter and other email updates.



Kellner and group seeking Common
Ground Dove at Paton Center in Arizona
Jennifer Tonge



Chris Wood, director of eBird
Cornell Lab

DFO's 90th Birthday Party, with eBird's (and Denver's) Chris Wood

Chris Wood (DFO alumnus, director of eBird)

October 13, 2025

6:30 p.m. MDT

[Lowry Conference Center](#)

[1061 Akron Way, Denver 80230](#)

LOOK FOR FOR E-VITE INVITATION IN EMAIL AND MORE DETAILS IN UPCOMING **DFO ON THE WING** MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

*NOTE: This program is on the **second Monday of the month** instead of the usual fourth Monday to align with the speaker's schedule*

Long before he collaborated in the creation of the global database and birding cultural phenomenon that is eBird, **Chris Wood** was a self-described bird nerd growing up in the Denver suburbs. In the late 1980s, seventh-grader Wood joined Denver Field Ornithologists to go on field trips and expand his precociously prodigious grasp of the world of Colorado birds.

Today, Wood is director of eBird and a prominent member of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology team at Cornell University in New York state. He is also managing director of the lab's Center for Avian Population Studies. As the most noteworthy alumnus of DFO in the birding world today, he will speak at a special in-person monthly evening program meeting to celebrate our club's 90th anniversary.

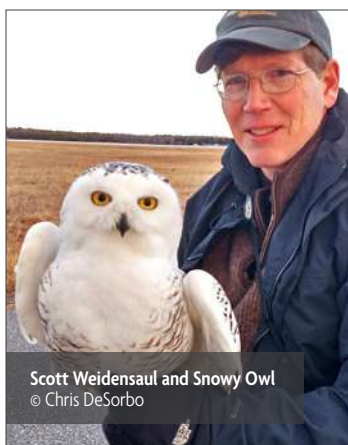
Mark your calendar NOW for the event of the season! Come celebrate DFO (birthday cake!), welcome Chris home, and mingle with friends old and new as we look forward to the last decade before DFO's centennial! Look for more details on Chris's topic and the venue for this live gathering in upcoming *DFO On the Wing* email newsletters and further email announcements as our anniversary event approaches.



Wood, right, birding with DFO members during Denver visit in February 2018
Patrick O'Driscoll



Chris Wood on a distant bird during field trip with DFO birders in 2018
Patrick O'Driscoll



Caught in the SNOWstorm: Collaborative Research on Snowy Owls

Scott Weidensaul (author, SNOWstorm co-founder)

Monday, November 24, 2025

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

LOOK FOR REGISTRATION LINK THIS FALL IN THE
OCTOBER ISSUE OF **THE LARK BUNTING** QUARTERLY

The winter of 2013-14 saw the largest irruption of Snowy Owls into the eastern United States in perhaps a century. That invasion also marked an unprecedented opportunity to learn more about these mysterious hunters of the Arctic. Out of that event and frantic weeks of organizing as the irruption unfolded came Project SNOWstorm, a collaborative research effort focused on this huge but underknown raptor of the North.

Author, researcher and SNOWstorm co-founder **Scott Weidensaul** (“WHY-den-sau”) will share the project’s story in “*Caught in the SNOWstorm*,” a Zoom webinar on **Monday, Nov. 24 at 7 p.m.** He will share the project’s story — how a huge, collaborative research effort focused on snowy owls came together so quickly. Funded with the help of people from around the globe, it has since grown into the largest and most comprehensive study of Snowy Owls in the world.

More than 40 scientists, bird banders and wildlife veterinarians have volunteered their time and efforts. Using sophisticated satellite transmitters, they have tracked more than 110 Snowy Owls from Alaska and the Dakotas to the Great Lakes, Northeast US and beyond. The project also consults with airports and airfields to prevent airplane-owl strikes, even relocating some birds to more secure spots.

Weidensaul presented another DFO program via Zoom three years ago, in March 2022, on global bird migration after the publication of his *New York Times* bestselling book, *A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds*. He has written nearly 30 other books on natural history, including the Pulitzer Prize finalist *Living on the Wind*. A fellow of the American Ornithological Society, he is a contributing editor for *Audubon* magazine and writes for a variety of publications, including the birding bimonthly *BWD* and the Cornell Lab’s *Living Bird* quarterly. Based in New Hampshire, Weidensaul is an active field researcher, studying Northern Saw-whet Owl migration for nearly 30 years, winter hummingbirds in the East and bird migration in Alaska.

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO’s April program

DFO keeps a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring programs. If you could not attend DFO’s 2025 evening programs before the summer break, click the “WATCH ONLINE” link below the April title to view that program recording on DFO’s YouTube channel, where you can also view the January, February and March programs. The DFO website’s “[Past Programs](#)” page also contains these and numerous other DFO programs from recent years

Monday, April 28, 2025

Research, Education & Conservation in Action: 2024 DFO Grantees Report

Holden Fox, William Churchill
Anderson, Alison Hazel — and guest
speaker Emily Braker, CU Boulder
Museum of Natural History

WATCH ONLINE

DFO ADBIRDTISEMENTS!

FREE to club members to seek, sell, swap or give away bird-related equipment, supplies, books, decorative items (art, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Include name, email and/or telephone number, and a weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (150-word limit). 1-2 photos or images per ad
- Ads do not carry over. To renew, resubmit by next deadline (Sept. 30, 2025)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials and/or questions to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.



FOR SALE: NEW Vortex Diamondback birding scope + tripod & head (\$400)

New **VORTEX Diamondback HD 20-60X85** (angled) spotting scope with **MANFROTTO** tripod and **MANFROTTO** head.

Complete setup has been taken into the field twice to compare with recently purchased (and more expensive) scope.

This scope includes original Vortex packaging plus neoprene protective covers for body, eyepiece and objective lenses, plus black canvas carrying case.

Included is very sturdy used Manfrotto 055SPROB tripod (two leg extensions) with Manfrotto 128RC head. Minimum tripod height is 3.94 inches and maximum is 70.28 inches. Tripod (5.29 pounds) can support 15.43 pounds and has quick-action leg locks. Head has 3/8-inch head-mount thread, 13.2-pound capacity, and pan/tilt locks. Head also has arm and adjustable vertical/horizontal tension knobs for fluid panning in any direction.

New scope retails for \$499.95. Prices on eBay for used tripod and head are \$100-\$150. This firm, non-negotiable offer is **\$400** for \$600-\$650 worth of quality equipment.

Contact **Gary Witt** at lagewitt@gmail.com or 303-905-6985.

1980s-2000: Golden times for DFO, confident as the 21st century beckoned

Editor's note: This year, Denver Field Ornithologists celebrates 90 years as a birding club. To mark this milestone, The Lark Bunting quarterly is publishing DFO @ 90, a new history of our club in four parts. Parts 1 and 2 appeared in the [January](#) and [April](#) issues. Part 3 follows, and Part 4 will appear in the October issue.

DFO was all about sharing, sharing the bird, sharing the knowledge, sharing the fun of getting out and learning stuff.

— **Joey Kellner** field trip leader, past president (1993-96)

Sharon Tinianow

As monthly meetings go, the April 1985 gathering of Denver Field Ornithologists was extraordinary. Not for the program topic, or the time of year, or even the refreshments being served. Of note was the occasion itself and the who's who of Colorado birding who were in the room because of it.

That evening meeting on Tuesday, April 2, 1985, celebrated the 50th anniversary of the club's founding. Members gathered in the Denver Museum of Natural History, the same building where, in the middle of the Great Depression, DFO was born as the Colorado Bird Club. DFO Board president **Jack Reddall** (1973-75, 1983-85) opened the anniversary evening by reading from the minutes of the first meeting in February 1935, when charter members of the new club were urged to steer clear of political wrangling and to save their pennies to purchase camping equipment for overnight birding trips.

Three charter members were present for the 1985 observance, and all were women: **Ruth Wheeler**, **Catherine Hurlbutt**, and



Embroidered patch
for DFO's 50th
anniversary in 1985

Lillian Wangnild (president 1940-42). They were joined by other longtime members and special guest **Muriel Bailey**, widow of **Alfred Bailey**, the museum's former director and long a friend of the club. Reddall's wife, **Dorothy**, presented corsages and boutonnieres to the guests.

Elizabeth "Betsy" Webb, the museum's curator of zoology, showed an artifact of the late director Bailey's tenure: the 1940 documentary *High Country*, which he produced. The museum's curator of ornithology, **Charles Chase** (known today as Charlie and our current DFO vice president), conducted a tour of the newly renovated Colorado Bird Hall. Longtime DFO members **Patty Echelmeyer** (president 1968-70) and **Diane Mullineaux** served refreshments while people looked through a scrapbook of DFO history prepared by **Judy Ward**. Embroidered anniversary patches featuring the DFO logo and "FOUNDED 1935" went for one dollar apiece and were oh so trendy. It was fashionable then to sew such emblems onto one's birdwatching vest or jacket.

Anniversary or not, the meeting followed the longstanding protocol of meetings past. Someone read aloud the minutes of the previous meeting. The treasurer gave a financial update. New members and guests were introduced. All present were invited to share aloud their recent notable bird sightings. Then a featured speaker (often a DFO member or local expert) presented on a topic of club interest.

Continued on page 15

About DFO @ 90

This four-part history of Denver Field Ornithologists marks 2025's 90th birthday of the club. The project team includes lead writer **Sharon Tinianow** (DFO president), *The Lark Bunting* editor **Patrick O'Driscoll**, and club historian **Kris Haglund**, with assistance from numerous members and supporters.

Research sources include DFO archives at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, where the club met from its founding in 1935 through 2018. Special thanks to the DMNS Archives Department, led by **Laura Uglean-Jackson**.

Current members with accounts, memories, photos and memorabilia from **2000 to the present are urged to share with us** for the final, fourth part of **DFO @ 90**, to be published in the **October Lark Bunting**. Contact Tinianow at sharontinianow@gmail.com and O'Driscoll at patodrisk@gmail.com.

DFO @ 90 cont from page 14

Social glue of club gatherings

In back of the meeting room, members could buy books at a DFO book table, which featured a "Birder's Guides" series by **Harold Holt** (president 1962-63) and **Jim Lane**. (Holt donated 40% of proceeds to DFO.) The monthly program meetings were always informative, but equally valuable was the person-to-person interaction, the congenial social glue holding friends old and new together around a shared passion for birds and birding.

With its golden anniversary, DFO had entered arguably its own golden age as a late-20th-century organization — confident in the abilities of its many seasoned birders and ready for the unknown possibilities ahead in the fast-approaching new century.

Field trips, always the main activity of the club, were still primarily on Saturdays and Sundays. Registration was not required but members were urged to phone the trip leader ahead of time that they'd attend. There were occasional weekday trips, but that idea didn't gain much traction. A notable exception was a new weekly meetup called Tuesday Birders, led by **Ann Bonnell** for those who were free on that weekday morning. The Tuesday Birders calendar was published in *The Lark Bunting* starting in 1988, and the group continues to this day as an independent venture under the leadership of longtime DFO members **Dave Hill** and **Cynthia Madsen**.

By the time DFO turned 50, some field trips were ranging much farther afield, often filling multiday Memorial Day and fourth of July weekends and other holidays. Wheeler led a memorable trip to Nebraska in 1984 to see the Sandhill Cranes, and **Bob Spencer** (president 1989-91) led trips to Routt and Jackson counties in 1992. Pueblo teen **Brandon Percival**, a new member in 1991, led trips in his hometown area. Charlie Chase led trips to Lamar and Westcreek. **Bob Righter** led one or two memorable out-of-state trips a year through the 1990s to a variety of destinations,



DFO field trip to Evergreen in 1986
DFO archives-DMNS

Continued on page 16



First Ptarmigan Award winner
Thompson Marsh on Deer
Creek field trip in June 1986
DFO archives-DMNS

DFO @ 90 *cont from page 15*

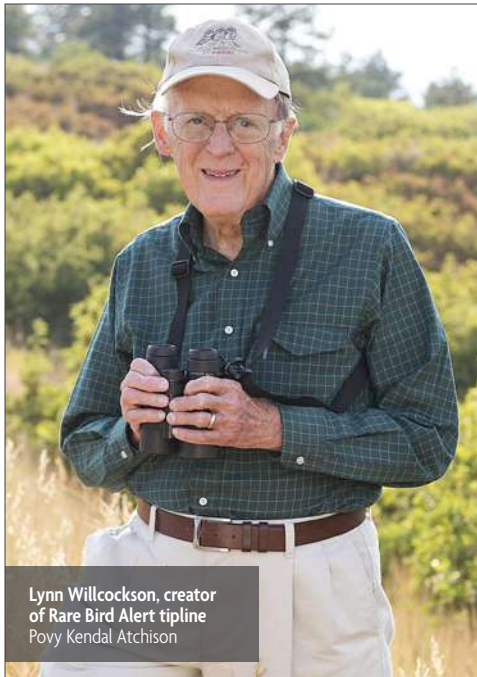
including Monterey, CA, southeast Arizona, the Upper Coast of Texas and the Bay of Fundy north of Maine. Husband and wife team **Dieter** and **Alicia Kamm** even led trips to Costa Rica.

DFO's expanding field trips program was led by co-chairs Wheeler and Spencer from 1980 through most of 1987. Each month they phoned field trip leaders and lined up a full month's worth of excursions. When Spencer became club vice president, which meant he would have to arrange speakers for DFO's monthly meetings, **Ruth Breckon** assumed his field trip co-chair role. The two Ruths continued to organize field trips until Wheeler stepped down in July 1992 at the age of 93. By then, the club was leading about 100 trips a year. Through the rest of the 1990s, **Mort Staatz**, **Jackie King**, **Marleen Eggerling**, **Pearl Jordan**, Patty Echelmeyer, and **Lynn Willcockson** (president 1963-66) all served terms as field trip co-chairs.



Ruth Wheeler, center in sunglasses,
a club founder, at rest stop on
1986 field trip to Eldoroa Mountain
DFO archives-DMNS

Continued on page 17



Lynn Willcockson, creator
of Rare Bird Alert tipline
Povy Kendal Atchison

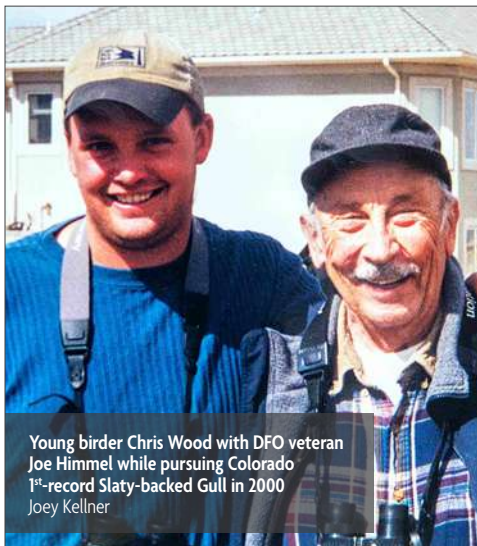
Same newsletter, changing visions

The Lark Bunting newsletter remained the same monthly publication it had been in previous years, with slight changes whenever a new editor took over. One major new focus was to assemble and publish a full report on the birds seen on field trips in the previous month. Trip leaders snail-mailed detailed trip reports to the editor, with date, destination, and full lists of observers and the bird species they saw. The editor then composed brief summaries of the month's trips to go with an exhaustive table that consolidated all that trip leader data. Members also were invited to submit additional reports of birds non-DFO outings. Tuesday Birders outings were included, too.

When Harold Holt became editor in 1970, he added more detail to the summaries, noting weather, total time spent, distance traveled, and number of species seen on each trip. He also added habitat particulars for each location to the table. When Jack Reddall took over as *Lark Bunting* editor in 1980, he asked for even more detail, including any observations of recognizable "forms" or subspecies. He also instructed trip leaders to list the birds they saw in American Ornithologists' Union checklist order and trip participants' names in alphabetical order.

Reddall, known as a strict and serious taskmaster, became famous for challenging whatever information did not seem correct to him. Leaders who failed to get their trip reports to him by the newsletter deadline saw their trip titles listed with a blunt note, "NO REPORT SUBMITTED," Jack's un-subtle nudge to be on time.

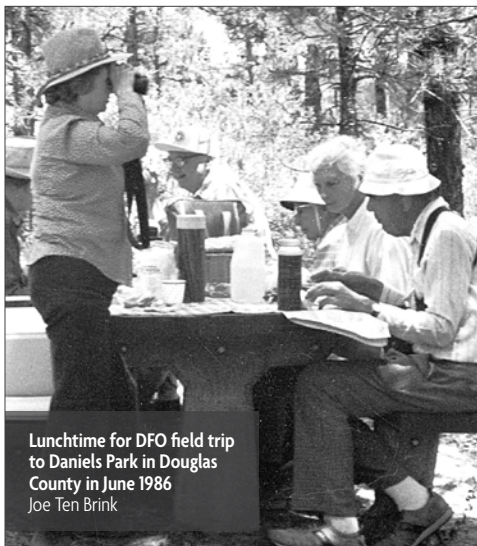
While the format of monthly meetings, the array of field trips, and the content of the printed *Lark Bunting* remained fairly consistent, the final 20 years of the 20th century were a time of club transition in other ways. DFO took its role as a documenter of Colorado birds more seriously. New technologies were making club recordkeeping and communications easier. Conservation actions and education opportunities expanded. And a new cadre of volunteer leaders came forward to carry on previous DFO generations' decades of work promoting the study, appreciation and preservation of Colorado birds and their habitats.



Young birder Chris Wood with DFO veteran
Joe Himmel while pursuing Colorado
1st-record Slaty-backed Gull in 2000
Joey Kellner

Documenting the birds

By the early 1990s, birders, conservationists and scientists noticed that songbird populations seemed to be declining. But the Colorado Division of Wildlife only monitored game species. It was DFO's own newsletter that was publishing the only written record of non-game birds seen in Colorado for every month of the year. When the Colorado Bird Observatory (now Bird Conservancy of the Rockies) conducted a study on the state's bird populations, issues of *The Lark Bunting* dating back 25 years were the main source of this valuable data. DFO's newsletter represented one of the few long-term collections of field data, especially for western bird species.



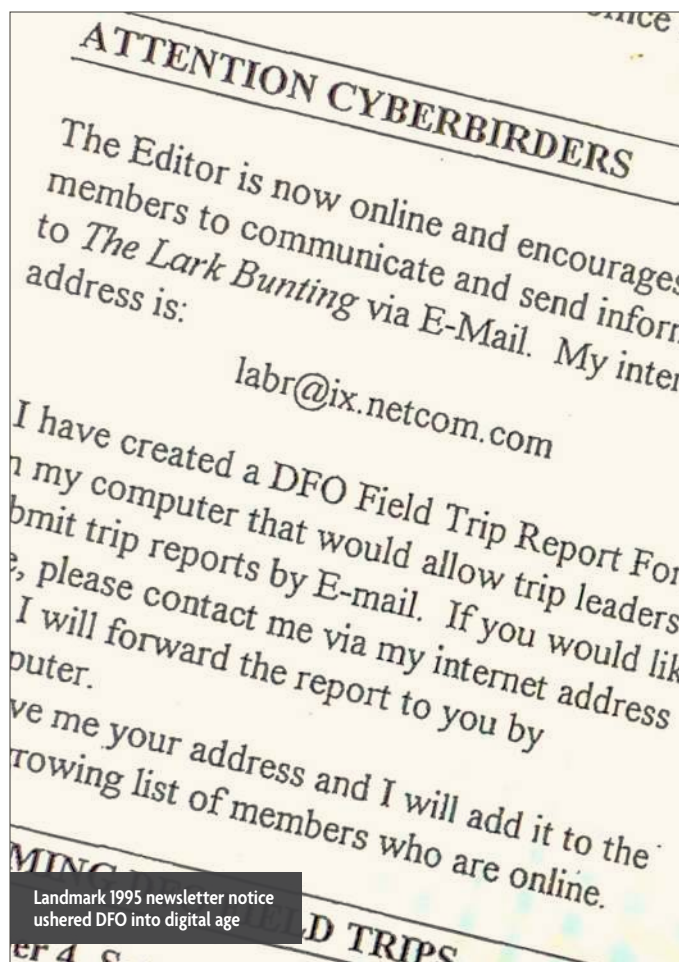
Lunchtime for DFO field trip
to Daniels Park in Douglas
County in June 1986
Joe Ten Brink

Continued on page 18

The Lark Bunting published an update on the bird observatory's project in the September 1991 issue. Study coordinator **Mike Carter** gave a presentation at DFO's October 1991 meeting on the project's early results. DFO further supported the observatory's five-year, three-part study with a cash donation.

New technology of the times

In 1982, the club's membership list, previously maintained on paper and updated annually by hand, was loaded onto a computer by member **Dave Martin**, making roster updates far easier. *The Lark Bunting*, printed for decades on an office mimeograph, transitioned to offset printing in 1994, a significant improvement in readability. The next year, newsletter editor **Lea Ann Brown** wrote a landmark notice, "Attention Cyberbirders," in the October 1995 issue. In it, she announced she now had an email address and encouraged all to communicate with her that way. Henceforth, out went the electric typewriter and in came a word processor to produce the newsletter. By 1998, DFO's rudimentary first website appeared — and with it, a fundamentally new way to notify members of club activities and to reach and recruit potential new members.



Meanwhile, DFO's Rare Bird Alert call-in service, created in 1979 by Lynn Willcockson and recorded daily in his basement, got an upgrade in 1982. A new phone line and new equipment were added to record and play back incoming rarity reports for callers seeking the latest rare-bird intel. The new system also added details of upcoming field trips and meetings to the familiar daily greeting in the voice of Lynn himself. After the greeting's conclusion, callers with new rarities to report could also leave spoken recordings for the next update.

In that first year after the upgrade, the system, called the RBA for short, took more than 3,000 calls from as far away as Maryland. The cost to maintain it was substantial, so members who donated to support it were acknowledged in *The Lark Bunting*. The service was so valuable to birders statewide that both Denver Audubon and Colorado Field Ornithologists made annual donations. In 1984, the American Birding Association added the phone number to its list of other state RBAs. DFO's was considered unique for its daily updates, vs. weekly updates elsewhere.

The popular service suffered an unsettling smear In May 1991 when someone posted a bogus rarity. As later reported in *The Lark Bunting*, a caller identifying himself as one of Colorado's most reliable observers reported that he and another prominent birder had seen a Bahama Swallow at a reservoir near Colorado Springs. The recording came in so late at night that the person monitoring the phone line did not, per usual practice, call the reporting party back to confirm. Overnight, half a dozen people from across Colorado traveled to see what turned out to be a nonexistent bird. One of those travelers collapsed in exhaustion after circling the entire reservoir in the heat. The prominent birders who'd been spoofed were getting calls from 6 a.m. on. The episode was a difficult lesson.

Continued on page 19

Thereafter, monitoring and updating the alert took a devoted committee of volunteers. Willcockson managed it for several years. After him, **Dave Martin**, **Scott Menough**, **Duane Nelson**, and **Norm Erthal** (president 1991-93) would each manage the phone line through the 1990s. Among their backups was **Dick Schottler**, whose cheery voice on the answering message greeted callers with, "Howdy birders, this is the Colorado Rare Bird Alert."

Conservation concerns

Bird-related conservation, which had sharpened amid landmark events of the 1960s and '70s, remained on the minds of many in DFO. The federal Endangered Species Act was renewed in 1982 to wide acclaim. A couple of years later, an unexpected slump in species reported in DFO's section of the 1983 Christmas Bird Count came up at the club's February 1984 meeting. Only 93 species had been reported, the lowest count since 1979 and just the second time since 1970 when the count fell short of 100 species.

Although the field trip-focused club did not have a conservation committee, DFO members freely advocated for action in ways large and small. At the January 1980 meeting, club president **Carol Hack** (1978-80) urged members to sign a petition to end animal trapping at Cherry Creek and Chatfield reservoirs. Catherine Hurlbutt, well known locally as "Birdie" for her avian advocacy, touted her opposition to the cruel practice of using live birds, legs bound with wire, to train hunting dogs. In 1983, Ann Bonnell reported that live ammunition was being used at the dog training area at Chatfield State Park. She urged members to protest to the state Parks Board and the Wildlife Commission. The public outcry appeared to have worked. In 1984, the dog training area no longer allowed the use of live birds, and trainers could only fire .22-caliber blanks.

In 1980, **Hugh Kingery** (later club president 1987-89) urged members to attend county discussion forums about Gov. **Richard Lamm**'s sweeping [Front Range Project](#), a citizen planning effort on major issues facing Colorado through the end of the 20th century, including open-space protection statewide. Also that year, **Colin Murray** circulated a petition to stop a gravel pit in Deer Creek Canyon and **Dieter Kamm** publicized ballot issues over Jefferson County Open Space. About the same time, the Denver Greenway Project — an ambitious plan to clean up and restore the South Platte River

corridor for wildlife while still allowing recreational use — recruited DFO to handle the bird portion of its baseline wildlife study.

Conservation topics in DFO program meetings through those years included "Are DFO Members Seeing Fewer Birds?" with **Mike Carter** of Colorado Bird Conservancy, "Conserving Avian Diversity" with **Fritz Knopf** of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and "Conservation Needs for Neotropical Migrant Birds" with **Dick Roth** of the USDA Forest Service.

Learning: A core DFO mission

In any era, both teaching and learning about birds and birding have always been at the heart of the club's mission. Lessons then and now ranged from the field ornithology of birding outings to the enlightenment found in DFO's informative monthly evening programs. DFO member **Tina Jones**, who just retired from the DFO Board this anniversary year, taught classes through the years for the museum and Denver Botanic Gardens on a variety of bird-related topics, from species ID and behavior to what to plant to attract and support birds in your own backyard. She also frequently presented at DFO program meetings. *The Lark Bunting* promoted Jones's courses as well as learning opportunities about birds with other organizations entirely.

The club's long relationship with the museum included learning availabilities led by Charlie Chase, an ornithologist with expertise at making lessons in ornithology accessible to non-scientists, including so many DFO members who attended his bird ID classes.

The club's educational focus got an unexpected boost in 1994 when DFO received a gift of \$15,000 from the estate of **Mary Hope Robinson**, a member since 1958. The board set up an endowment and used the interest income to award modest grants for educational projects. After publishing guidelines for grant applications in the newsletter, DFO made the first grant in 1995 to Thornton high school student **Tim Mitzen**. The award allowed him to attend [Camp Chiricahua](#), a summer enrichment camp for young birders in southeastern Arizona's renowned "Sky Islands" region. The Robinson endowment became the start of what today is the DFO Research, Education & Conservation Fund, which since 2012 has awarded tens of thousands of dollars in grants.

Continued on page 20

Diverse birding, datakeeping, and the joy of lists

The generation of birders who made this volunteer organization go in the last years of the 20th century engaged with ornithology and birding in diverse ways. Patty Echelmeyer, though herself a “lister,” was in DFO first for the fun, the laughter, and the joy of discovery. So was Ruth Wheeler, a club founder more than 50 years earlier and a consummate nature lover who volunteered in a variety of club roles through the decades. In contrast, Jack Reddall, an absolute stickler for accurate bird ID, took the club’s responsibility for documenting bird sightings with stern seriousness. Somewhere in between was Birdie Hurlbutt, who so loved birds that she became a certified wildlife rehabilitator, filling her Denver home with those in need of special care.

Some members became truly expert field ornithologists. **Bob Andrews** (DFO president 1980-81) and **Bob Righter** (DFO treasurer 1982-86) co-wrote *Colorado Birds: A Reference to Their Distribution and Habitat*. Their 442-page opus was a worthy 1992 update to *Birds of Colorado*, the two-volume “bible” published almost three decades before by **Alfred M. Bailey** and **Robert J. Neidrach**, legendary giants of the Denver museum and friends of DFO.

Near century’s end, most DFO members were keeping life lists of the birds they loved. Some of them relished (and still do) the competitive nature of hitting birding milestones, from 300 or even 400 or more species in a single year to the elite “400 Club” of lifetime Colorado species at a time when the state’s official list of species seen had not yet reached 500. (It is 521 today.)

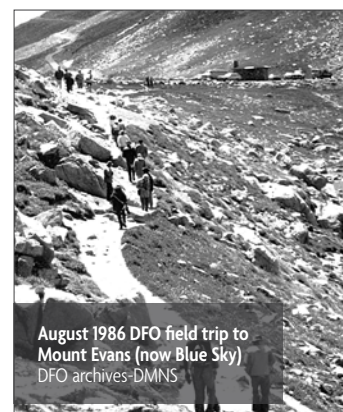
A memorable February 1994 article in *The Lark Bunting*, “DFOs HOT-SHOT BIRDERS HAD A GOOD YEAR,” captured the spirit of the chase. Writer **Gail Evans** celebrated 15 members who saw at least 300 total species in 1993, including one, Jack Reddall, who recorded the most of all in DFO (474). Six of those birders saw 300 or more species *inside* Colorado, “an awe-inspiring accomplishment in any year,” Evans wrote. They included **Joe Roller** (president 2015-17), Duane Nelson, **Joe Himmel**, Bob Spencer, 19-year-old Brandon Percival (his third straight 300-plus Colorado birds year) and **Karleen Schofield** (the most Colorado species at 342, and 454 species overall).

That same year, Kellner and 17-year-old Chris Wood set a Colorado big-day record with more than 180 species one day in June. Of special note is that Wood grew up to work at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, where he helped create and is now director of eBird, the global community-science platform and database. Barely a decade after this 1993 DFO moment, eBird’s debut in the 2000s would foster an eruption of birders old and new, tracking their yearly and life checklists online like these determined DFO forebears did with pencil and paper in the pre-computer age.

And there it was: Denver’s original bird club, nearing the doorstep of the new millennium, still bringing people together in the field and in program gatherings of shared discovery, focused on the birds we love. DFO had met the challenge of its 20th-century origins and maturation. Now it faced new tests and tasks: 25 years of astonishing change and continued growth in the 21st century, leading to 90 years and counting of Denver Field Ornithologists today. Join us here in October (and at DFO’s “birthday party” with eBird’s Wood on Oct. 13) as this anniversary history concludes and we look forward together to DFO’s centennial and beyond.



Always smiling Patty Echelmeyer, DFO president in 1968-70 and a longtime field trip leader
Courtesy of Fosha family



August 1986 DFO field trip to Mount Evans (now Blue Sky)
DFO archives-DMNS



A typical crowd today for Tuesday Birders, casual meetup group formed decades ago by DFO birders
Jim Esten

READ DFO @ 90 PART 1
ARTICLES BEGIN PAGE 14

READ DFO @ 90 PART 2
ARTICLES BEGIN PAGE 18

DFO President **Sharon Tinianow** (2023-26), who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president and is former editor of *The Lark Bunting* (2017-20). She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder’s Museum of Natural History

Ruth Wheeler: Outside DFO spotlight, a “life long friend of nature and humanity”

Sharon Tinianow

Ruth Wheeler, one of the founding members of Denver Field Ornithologists, was just one of those people. You know the kind.

She toiled tirelessly for years behind the scenes (and even behind the camera) in a variety of volunteer roles for the Colorado Bird Club (and for DFO after the club's renaming in the 1960s). She did things without being asked — like keeping a scrapbook of DFO memorabilia and photos, including her own shots of birds and her fellow birders. She would later donate that incredibly valuable volume to the archives of the Denver Museum of Natural History (now Nature & Science). For us this year, it was a rich font of information about DFO's earlier days when we began the year-long “DFO @ 90” project to tell the club's history for our 90th anniversary.

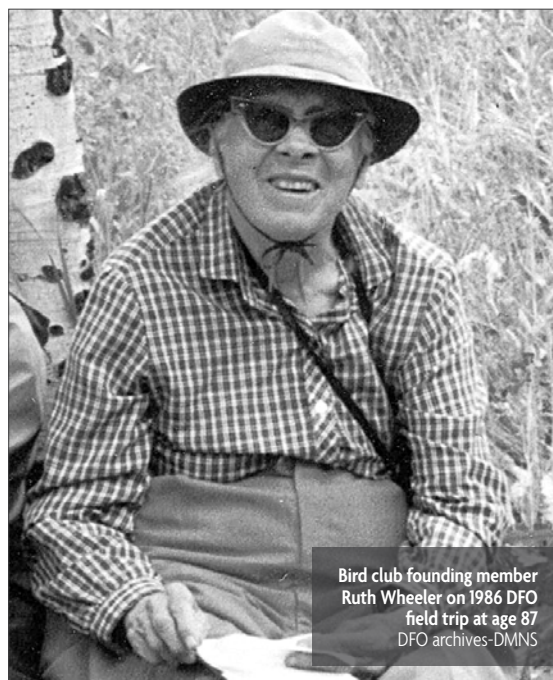
Forty years ago, on the 50th anniversary of the club, Wheeler donated a complete set of DFO newsletters to those archives. Naturally, she also served on the planning committee for the 50th birthday celebration at the April 1985 monthly meeting. All this was classic Ruth Wheeler. Her selfless work helped ensure continuity so the club not only would outlive her but also thrive well into the new century.

There was much more to her than what is captured in DFO meeting minutes and old *Lark Bunting* newsletters. One of the more memorable figures in DFO's long history deserves a closer look.

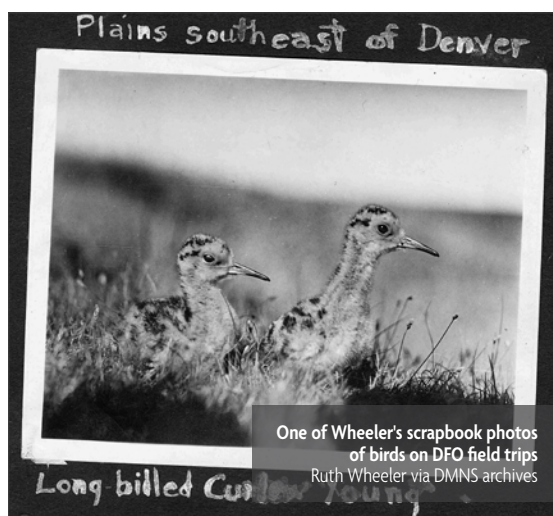
Born in New York City on Sept. 23, 1899, Wheeler was highly educated, earning a double-major bachelor's degree in botany and English from Washburn University in Topeka, KS, and a master's in zoology from the University of Kansas. Her academic ambitions were natural: Her parents met while students in college and the family lived for most of her childhood in Manhattan, KS, where her father taught at Kansas State University.

When her parents and youngest sister relocated to Denver for her father's job, Wheeler came with them and became a teacher at Denver's Skinner Junior High (now Middle) School. In an interview after her retirement, she said spending 38 years teaching science to 13-year-olds was her greatest accomplishment. Wheeler never married, and she continued to live with and care for her aging mother after her father's death.

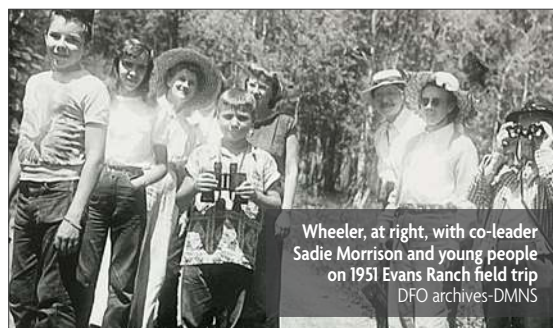
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Bird club founding member
Ruth Wheeler on 1986 DFO
field trip at age 87
DFO archives-DMNS



One of Wheeler's scrapbook photos
of birds on DFO field trips
Ruth Wheeler via DMNS archives



Wheeler, at right, with co-leader
Sadie Morrison and young people
on 1951 Evans Ranch field trip
DFO archives-DMNS



Wheeler, binoculars always up
DFO archive-DMNS

DFO @ 90 PROFILE *cont from page 21*

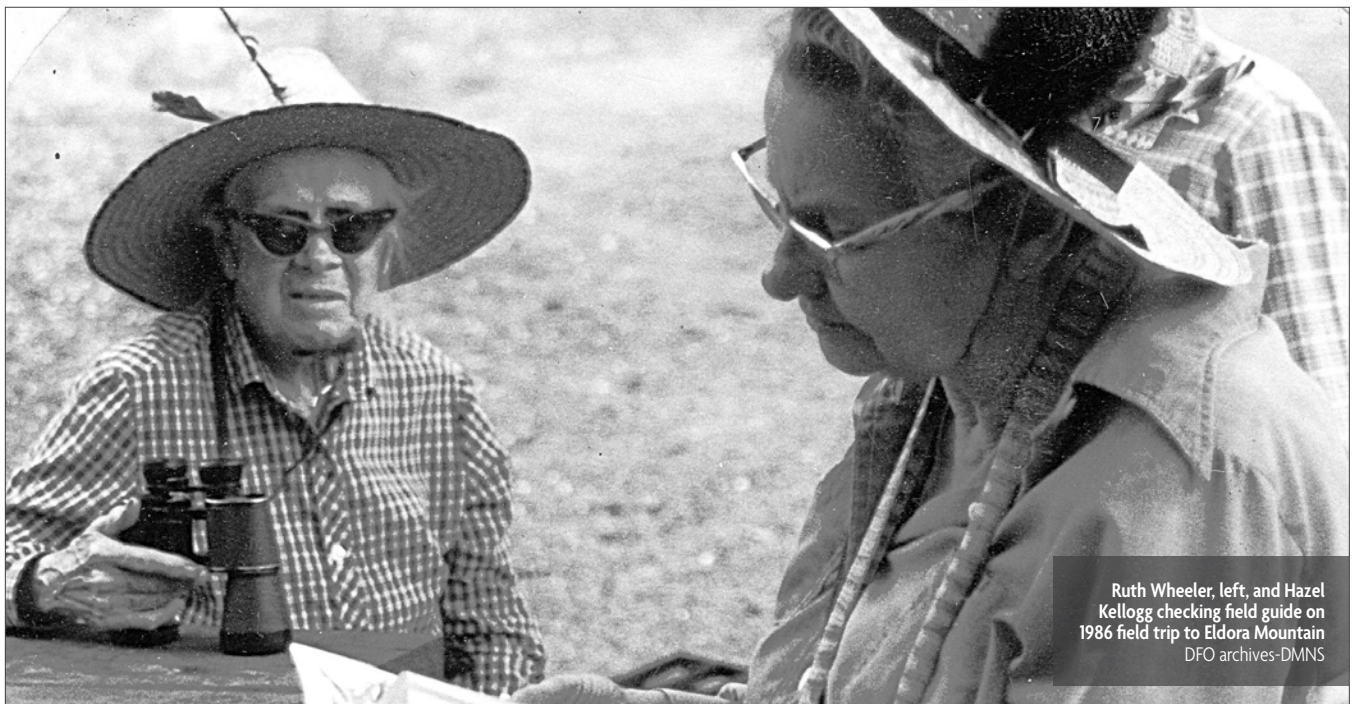
It was no ordinary household. Having inherited her father's curiosity about the natural world, Ruth kept a collection of reptiles, including garter snakes, a corn snake and a small boa. After she added snapping turtles to the collection, they overwintered in laundry tubs in the basement.

In 1932, she joined the [Colorado Mountain Club](#), where her passion for birding was sparked on the club's annual spring bird trip. Meeting in Denver City Park, about 100 people divided into smaller groups led by local bird experts, including **Robert J. Niedrach**, the Denver museum's curator of ornithology. When Wheeler learned he was teaching an evening class in ornithology at East High School, she signed up.

She was in a group of students who enjoyed Niedrach's class so much that they formed the Colorado Bird Club in 1935. She served a couple of terms as vice president, but organizing and leading field trips was her real passion. She went on to hold the position of chair or co-chair of the club's field trips committee for the next 56 years, minus a few short breaks.

Beginning in the 1950s, she and **Sadie Morrison** teamed to lead field trips every Saturday afternoon to a variety of destinations. She especially sought to have a trip to Barr Lake at least monthly, even in the winter, so the club could keep a complete four-season record of what birds were in that key area. Further, she felt it important to lead DFO trips in every ecological area in Colorado. Her personal favorite, though, was Roxborough State Park.

Continued on page 23



Ruth Wheeler, left, and Hazel Kellogg checking field guide on 1986 field trip to Eldora Mountain
DFO archives-DMNS

Charlie Chase, DFO vice president today but a museum ornithologist back in the 1970s, recalled the first time he ran into Wheeler in the field. The day before, he had been on his first organized birdwatching trip, led by DFO's **Jack Reddall** and **Steve Larson**. Wowed as the two expert birders called out sparrow IDs from the car at 30 miles an hour, Chase decided he wanted to learn to do that, too. But when he encountered about 20 other DFO birders at Cherry Creek State Park the next day, the group had a radically different birding style.

He found the group — which included Wheeler and DFO veterans **Patty Echelmeyer** and **Bob Buttery** — wandering around, calling out birds as they saw them. Chase remembered how Wheeler, remarkably small in stature, shouted out her spottings with a piercing, nasal voice that cut through everyone else's. "Black-capped Chickadee!" she sang out. Echelmeyer, meanwhile, seemed to be laughing the whole time, and Wheeler would catch the giggles, too. "Wow, this is different," Chase thought to himself — so very fun and very different from the serious Jack Reddall way.

In December 1971, 36 years after helping start the club, Wheeler, **Catherine Hurlbutt** and **Robina Storrie** received life memberships in DFO as surviving charter members. By now 72, Ruth continued to volunteer in additional capacities, serving as corresponding secretary from 1975 to 1978.

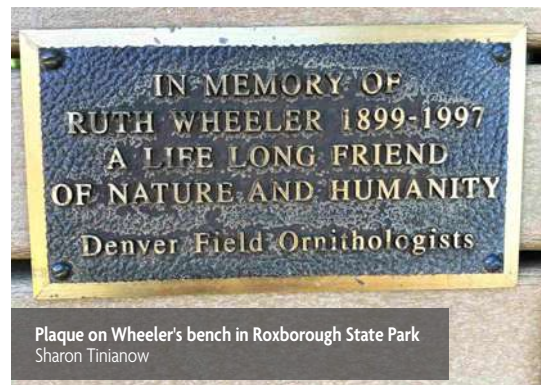
A decade later, Wheeler and prominent Denver birder **Thompson Marsh** (president 1959-60) became the first recipients of the [Ptarmigan Award](#), a new DFO honor introduced by president **Bob Spencer** to recognize volunteers who go above and beyond in service to the club.

When Wheeler's eyesight began to fail in 1992, she stepped down as field trips co-chair at age 93. She spoke enthusiastically and appreciatively of many members but downplayed her own contributions. But members Echelmeyer, **Lynn Willcockson** and **David Pantle** came back the following year with a two-page written tribute in the August 1993 issue of *The Lark Bunting* that concluded: "We want her to have our applause for her dedication to DFO, for jobs well done throughout the community, and for being a special person who has introduced nature and its wonders to young and old alike."

Four years later, on Dec 6, 1997, Ruth Wheeler died at age 98. She was buried near her parents in Crown Hill Cemetery in Wheat Ridge. Soon after, DFO arranged to place a memorial bench in her name at Roxborough State Park, just outside the visitor center. It is a lovely spot to sit and enjoy the birds and the view in Ruth's favorite DFO field trip destination. Attached to the bench, a plaque lauds her as "A LIFE LONG FRIEND OF NATURE AND HUMANITY."

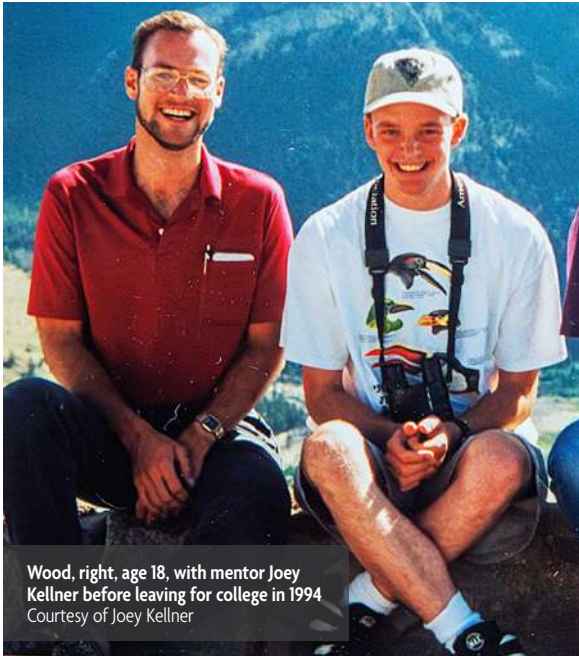


DFO's commemorative bench in Ruth Wheeler's memory in Roxborough State Park
Sharon Tinianow



Plaque on Wheeler's bench in Roxborough State Park
Sharon Tinianow

From 7th grade bird nerd to Mr. eBird: Chris Wood's flyway to fame began in DFO



Wood, right, age 18, with mentor Joey Kellner before leaving for college in 1994
Courtesy of Joey Kellner

Patrick O'Driscoll

As a boy of 4 or 5, **Chris Wood** was so obsessed with dinosaurs that he searched relentlessly for fossils in the sandbox in his Morrison, CO backyard. After two years of fruitless digging, something new caught his boyhood gaze: a birdfeeder. Not long after he installed it in the yard, a stunningly colorful bird flew in. He looked it up in his first field guide: a male [Evening Grosbeak](#).

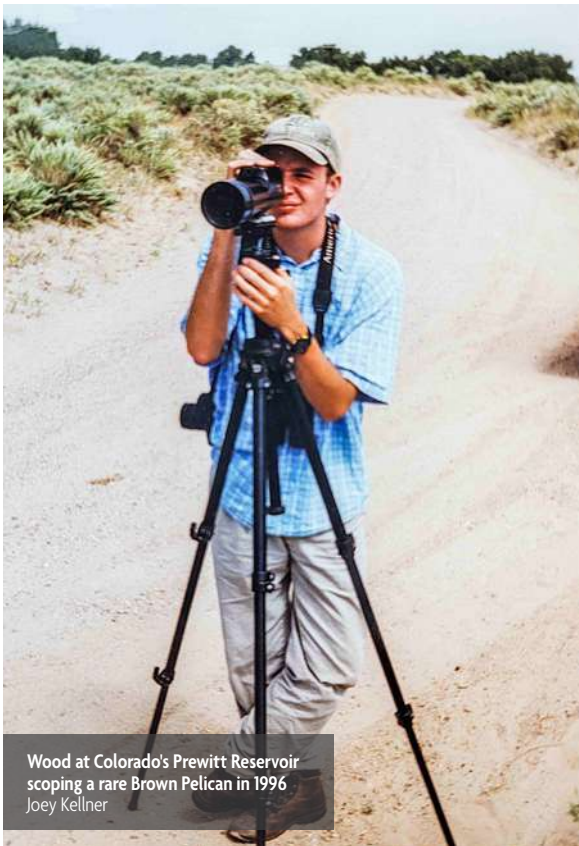
Chris, now age 7, was hooked on a new and lasting obsession. “My mom could tell when there were good birds coming to the feeder,” he later told an interviewer, “because I would take the thermometer and hold it up to a hot lightbulb to get myself a ‘fever’ so I could stay home from school and enjoy the birds.”

Teenaged Chris would pull another hooky trick a few years later when an incredibly rare bird showed up a 20-minute drive from school. By then, he had discovered Denver Field Ornithologists — and without DFO, he would never have seen that Colorado lifer.

Wood grew up to be an ornithologist, of course — one who helped create and now directs [eBird](#), the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's global community science database and birding cultural phenomenon. He is the club's most prominent alumnus in the birding world today. Just 49 this week, he gives DFO first credit for setting him on his successful career path.

He even draws a direct line between his boyhood DFO education — strong on data, species counts and distribution — and his work at Cornell today. “For me, it is such an incredibly important organization. eBird certainly wouldn't be the same without DFO. It was, kind of by extension, in a lot of the things that the lab does now, in eBird and Merlin.”

Chris was going on 13 in 1989 when he went on his first DFO field trip. “There was another kid at my school that was kind of into birds, and he knew about DFO,” he recalls. “We ended up going on a couple of trips.” Over the next decade, Wood literally grew up as a birder among a DFO who's who of many of Colorado's most talented avian enthusiasts: **Jack Reddall, Harold Holt, Hugh Kingery, Patty Echelmeyer, Duane Nelson, Dick Schottler, Karleen Schofield, Norm Erthal, Ira Sanders, Joe Roller, Lynn Wilcockson, Norm Lewis,**



Wood at Colorado's Prewitt Reservoir scoping a rare Brown Pelican in 1996
Joey Kellner

Continued on page 25

Bob Andrews, Tina Jones, Bob Spencer, Bob Richter, Warren Finch, Steve Stachowiak, Ed Holub . . . the checklist of DFO notables goes on.

But none impressed Chris more than the first one he met at his first DFO monthly program meeting in October 1989. “**Joey Kellner** came up to me and invited me to do the Chatfield State Park count,” Wood remembers. “There were so many people in DFO that were very, very supportive, but Joey, he’s definitely my mentor. Most mentors, you learn from them things to do and you learn things not to do. But Joey didn’t have any bad habits. He is just so good. And he’s such a nice guy.” The middle-school bird nerd and one of DFO’s sharpest and most engaging field trip leaders were an instant match.

Chris had come to that first meeting for an in-depth presentation unlikely to attract a 13-year-old. “It was one of Harold Holt’s oral, annotated checklist programs of the birds of Colorado, complete with the best slide he had of each bird,” Wood recalls. “I thought it was awesome! I loved the history, the records, and all that stuff was super, super cool to me — and everybody else was falling asleep!”

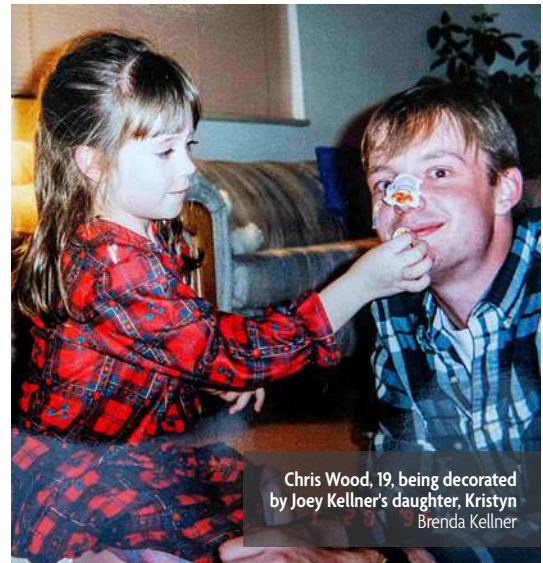
Then as now, school-aged birders were rare in DFO’s mostly grownup ranks. But Chris found a young friend just a year older in **Brandon K. Percival** of Pueblo, himself a birder since age 6, who joined DFO two years after Wood. “He was really the only other kid at the time that was into birds,” Wood says. “This was way before the internet.” Even though they lived 115 miles apart, the teens talked birds by phone, “and back then, the most expensive phone calls you could make were in-state long-distance.”

Wood and Percival were uncommonly gifted, both reaching Colorado’s elite 400-species club in their teens. Both led DFO field trips, presented at program meetings, and later collaborated on regional columns for *North American Birds*. Percival, of course, is one of Colorado’s most prominent birders today — still in Pueblo and, since at least 2015, the state’s regional editor of Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count.

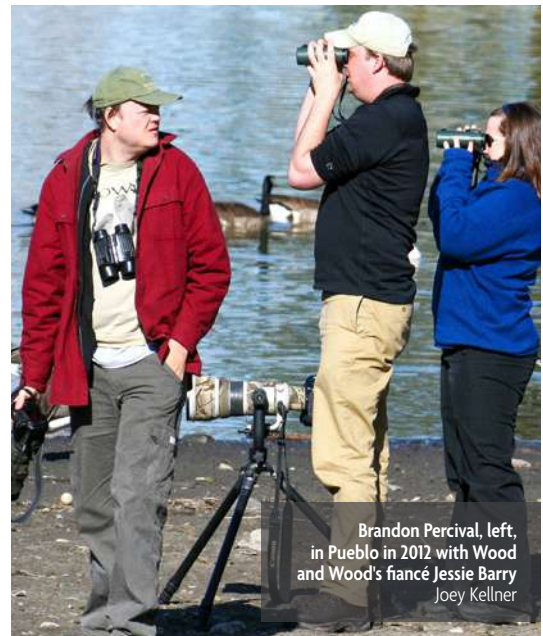
Meanwhile, in Wood’s senior year of high school, he and Kellner set a new Colorado “big day” record in 1994 (a 180-something count that Chris would return as an adult to [re-set at 229 species in 2016](#) with his Cornell Lab “Team Sapsucker” squad). In college ([Ripon College](#), environmental studies), Wood also served on the Colorado Bird Records Committee and was photo editor for *Birding* magazine.

By then, he had been primed for his Cornell future by another DFO legend, Jack Reddall, a no-nonsense stickler for birding data. “Jack was really oriented around keeping a complete list of all the birds that you’d see, with numbers. I learned that very early. It’s safe to say, I was pretty interested in numbers and status and distribution when I was still in high school.”

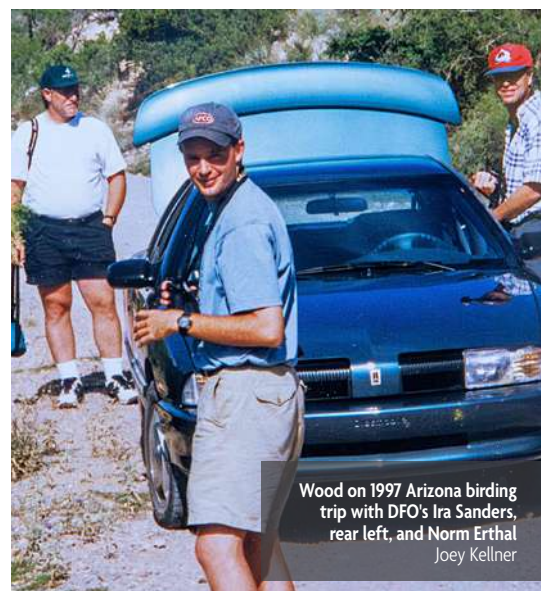
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Chris Wood, 19, being decorated by Joey Kellner's daughter, Kristyn
Brenda Kellner



Brandon Percival, left, in Pueblo in 2012 with Wood and Wood's fiancé Jessie Barry
Joey Kellner



Wood on 1997 Arizona birding trip with DFO's Ira Sanders, rear left, and Norm Erthal
Joey Kellner



Birders on a February 2018 DFO day trip with Chris Wood during his visit to Denver to speak to the club. From left, Karen Drozda, Buzz Schaumberg, Gregg Goodrich, Wood, the late Joe Roller, Chris Gilbert and Nick Komar
Patrick O'Driscoll

Wood says Reddall's writings in *The Lark Bunting* about subspecies in the 1980s and '90s also introduced him to the notion of regional variation, a key theme later in his eBird work. "Jack had these different treatments on different subspecies, things that weren't yet in the field guides, like Mountain's and Gambel's White-crowned Sparrows, and eastern and western Red-tailed Hawks. Jack had some of the first treatments of those, certainly that I'd ever seen."

As a kid, Chris also delighted in the Colorado Rare Bird Alert, a taped telephone answering machine message that DFO sponsored and updated daily with notable bird sightings. Pre-internet, it was the only central tipoff around. "I'd call it like 15 times a day to see if anything new had shown up," Wood remembers. But he would still rely on mentor Kellner to alert him "if there was something super-rare."

That happened memorably on the morning of May 3, 1993, when DFO's Dick Schottler reported an astonishing find: a [Red-faced Warbler](#), foraging in a maple tree in the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt. Hundreds of miles from home (southern New Mexico, Arizona and Mexico), it was the species' first known occurrence in Colorado.

As birders passed the word via land line, Kellner thought immediately of Wood, a 16-year-old junior in class at the Colorado Academy. Phoning the school, Kellner asked to speak to Chris about an important matter.

"I didn't even know there was a phone in the classroom," Wood recalls with a laugh. "My European literature teacher, **Anne Strobridge**, answered the phone and said, 'Chris, it's for you.'" Puzzled but taking the receiver, he answered, "Hello?" It

was Kellner. "Joey said, 'Chris! There's a Red-faced Warbler at the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt!'"

Seizing the opportunity, cool-headed Chris put on a frown, as if hearing news of a family emergency. "Oh no! That's terrible!" he play-acted into the phone as his teacher stood by. "Let me see if I can make it there."

"I hang up the phone and I tell her, 'I'm sorry. Something's come up. I have to go.'" The trusting teacher nodded yes and sent Chris on his way. Since he had just got his driver's license, he went out to the car and took off. But hours after Schottler's sighting, could Wood find the rare bird on his own?

"Joey had told me where it was, and I sort of knew. But you couldn't call anybody or text anybody. And when I got to where I thought it was, there's nobody else there! You can imagine that if a Red-faced Warbler showed up in Denver now, there would be a hundred people!" Still, Chris persevered alone and eventually found the bird. As often happens, the rarity was gone the next day.

"That's why the Red-faced Warbler stands out," he adds. "It was the one time that I actually got a call at school and sort of sneaked out. The next day, Anne was like, 'Is everything OK?' I said, 'Yeah, OK,' and I told her the truth. I was a little nervous at first. But everybody at school knew. Birding wasn't cool, but it wasn't super-dorky, either. And by the time I was in college, every step up in birding, it got cooler and cooler."

That's Chris Wood, the original DFO cool kid, playing today in a far bigger sandbox than the one he once dug for fossils. As he notes in his Cornell Lab bio: "I've never really given up on the dinosaurs — I just focused on their closest living relatives."

Home again: the bright, charming birds of Joe Chen's brush and pen

Patrick O'Driscoll

Last September, followers of the [Denver Field Ornithologists Facebook Group](#) began to notice something missing from the feed of new bird photos, field trip reviews, requests for bird ID help and updates on DFO activities:

Where did **Joe Chen**'s bird paintings go?

Ever since joining DFO in 2018, Chen had been creating and posting single artworks of key or favorite birds he'd seen on each field trip. A frequent participant on DFO outings, he sometimes completed and posted the paintings the same day of the field trips.

Over the years, scores of Joe's bright ink-and-watercolor works, in the spare but expressive Chinese ink-painting style of his native Taiwan, delighted Facebook page readers. *The Lark Bunting* even profiled him and his art in the [November 2020 issue](#) and displayed his elegant rendering of a Red-headed Woodpecker from Prewitt Reservoir on the cover.

But in fall 2024, the Facebook postings suddenly ceased. Chen had taken breaks before, for trips to visit family back home. Postings of other images and photos from Taiwan on his Facebook page showed he was there again. But as his absence stretched through October, November and December, fans of his bird art felt the void. Were Joe and his paintings — unique images of birds amid the usual stream of bird photos on the Facebook group page — gone for good?

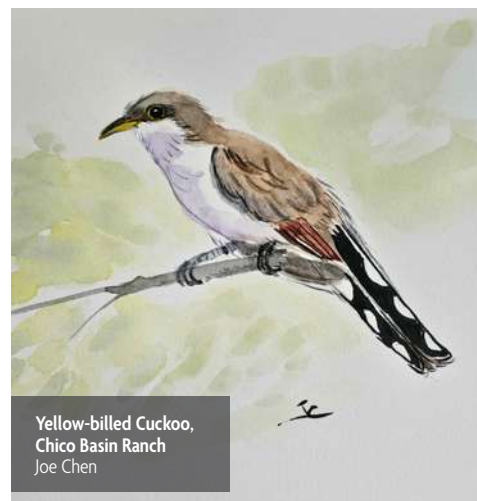
Fall and winter had reached into spring when, on April 24, a fresh painting in Joe's signature style popped up on the DFO Group's Facebook feed. It was a Blue-winged Teal, seen on a DFO field trip to Lagerman Reservoir in Boulder County the previous week. Joe Chen was back!

Joe says he actually returned to Denver on April 3, but it took a couple of weeks to get back in the groove. "I was at a disadvantage, so many field trips were already full," he explains. "I was out for seven months, so now I'm doing some catch up." The lengthy Taiwan absence was in part for his wife's extended visit to her mother, now in her 80s, a two-hour drive south of the capital, Taipei City. But Chen also wanted to take more classes in Chinese painting techniques. He birded a bit locally, but not a lot.

Continued on page 28



Joe Chen in 2022 with two earlier paintings, at First Creek in Green Valley Ranch
Patrick O'Driscoll



Yellow-billed Cuckoo,
Chico Basin Ranch
Joe Chen



Blue Grosbeak,
Cherry Creek SP
Joe Chen



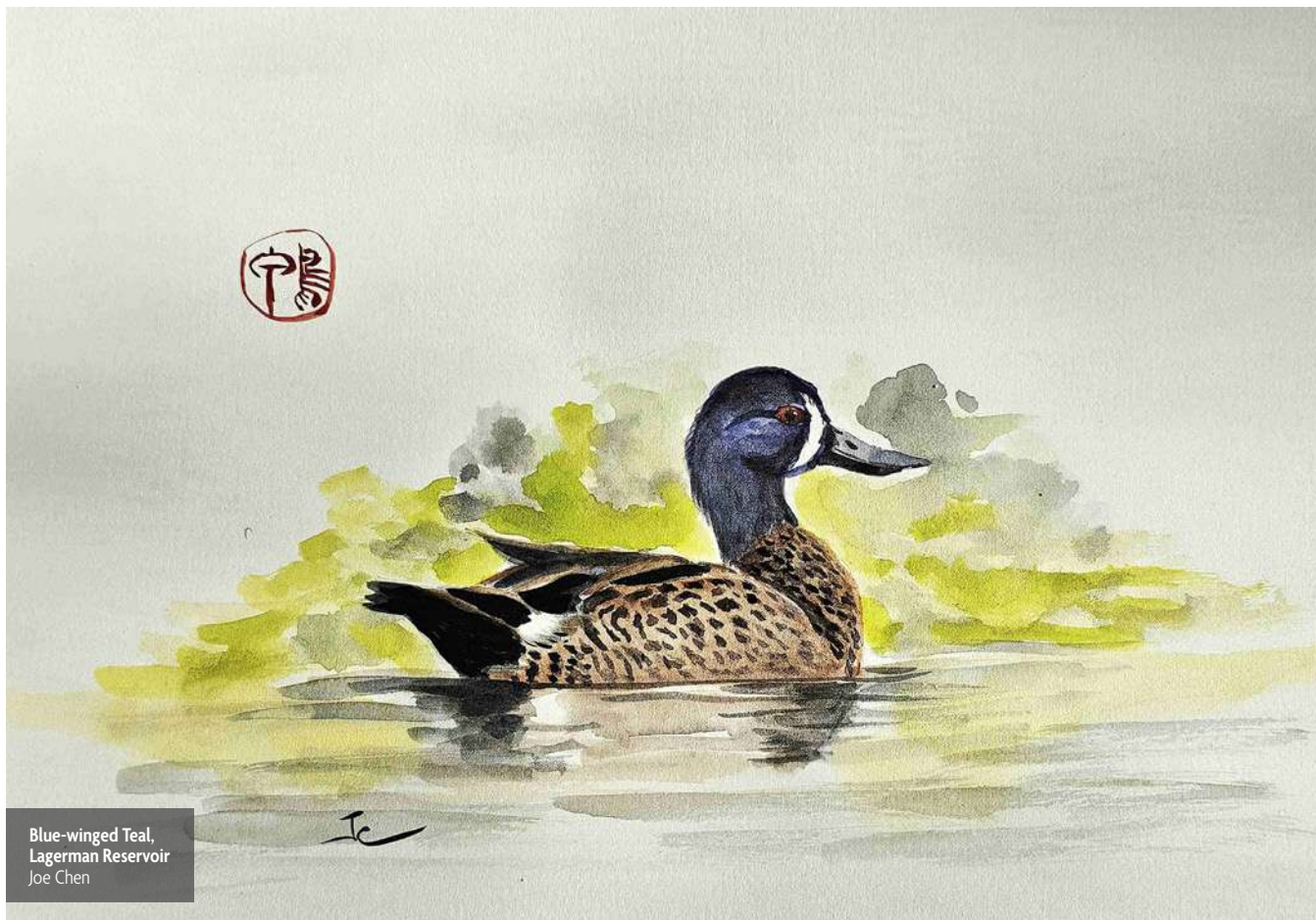
Great Crested Flycatcher,
Tamarack Ranch SWA
Joe Chen

JOE CHEN *cont from page 27*

Are those classes why his Blue-winged Teal seemed to have a certain new richness and detail? Perhaps. Joe focused on the more detailed “magic brush” technique — layered painting with more detailed strokes using small brushes that contain only a few hair bristles. “You use the black ink to draw the bird or flower, then you color it. The trick is on the coloring part. It’s layer by layer,” he says. “The eyes and the bill, sometimes I paint more detail.” With the teal, “I cannot just focus on the shape, features, but also the expression — more like a live animal. I tried to do that here.”

Since returning, Joe has posted more than two dozen new field trip bird images on Facebook — and one of them is also the “cover bird” of this issue of *The Lark Bunting*. “I’m still learning and practicing,” he says. (The “studio” in his Green Valley Ranch home in Denver is still simply the dining-room table.) And he’s quickly filling up his 2025 Colorado birding checklist. In April and May alone, he tallied 160 species. “Of course, I missed all the birds here,” Chen adds. “This is like seeing old friends again.” Although he first took up birding in his native land, “somehow I think I am more familiar with the birds here than in Taiwan.”

Today, Joe has a simple summer goal: “Watch more birds and paint more birds” — and his DFO Facebook followers can’t wait to see them.



Blue-winged Teal,
Lagerman Reservoir
Joe Chen

Continued on page 28



Red-eyed Vireo,
Chico Basin Ranch
Joe Chen



Mountain Bluebird,
Ponderosa Preserve
Joe Chen



Upland Sandpiper,
Tamarack Ranch SWA
Joe Chen



Bobolink female and male,
eastern Boulder, June 1
Joe Chen

DFO helps new and young birders focus along revived Sand Creek greenway

Jill Boice

Have you ever walked, bicycled or birded along Sand Creek? In my childhood many decades ago, I played in the creek, under and to the east of the Peoria Street bridge, where it emerged from the fenced-off grounds of the old Stapleton International Airport. Back then it was a muddy little creek through a trashy wasteland.

If you haven't been there recently — or if you've never visited the creek before — I urge you to do so, at once! The meager stream where I once caught tadpoles in its little ponds is now a flourishing natural area. The greenway's remarkable, 13-mile path through northeast metro Denver includes Bluff Lake Nature Center and Morrison Nature Center, but they are just a fraction of its wonders.

The creek's revival is due mostly to the efforts of [The Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership](#), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to protect and promote the entire natural corridor. Since its establishment in 2000, the partnership has helped raise funds for, plan and develop an array of amazing green infrastructure along the trail. The greenway's user-friendly trails, sturdy bridges, charming parks and healthy wetlands provide recreation to many neighborhoods along its course. Sand Creek's riparian habitats now attract a healthy variety of birds and other wildlife.

Now that much of the trail system is established, the partnership's emphasis is on citizen involvement through equitable access, awareness and engagement for diverse communities along the greenway. In that effort, the Sand Creek partnership successfully applied to Denver Field Ornithologists' Research, Conservation & Education Grant Fund for \$990 to purchase binoculars and other items to support bird walks for greenway community members.

To enhance the effects of that grant, the DFO Board of Directors has agreed to support direct collaboration with the greenway partnership. The aim is for DFO members to help lead bird walks (many participants are young, inexperienced and could benefit from DFO expertise) and to be a continuing resource for greenway activities. The Sand Creek partnership also conducts regular cleanups along the creek, a hands-on way for DFO members to help sustain local bird habitats.

This new initiative needs DFO volunteers to help it flourish. Can you join us? To help with a cleanup day or to join a bird walk, a yoga class or educational event, visit the [greenway partnership's website](#) for specific details, dates, times and registration information. Upcoming soon are a July 16 evening bird walk co-led by DFO (5:30-7 p.m.), a July 19 "Nature Pop-up" on bugs at Bluff Lake (10 a.m.-1:30 p.m.), an Aug. 2 volunteer trash pickup and invasive weed control session (9 a.m.-noon) and an Aug. 23 "forest bathing" time in nature (9 a.m.-noon).

Do you have an idea for a program along the greenway? Contact **Jill Boice**, DFO's Grants Committee chair, at jill@booksandcats.net or **Elena Smith**, education and program director for the greenway group at esmith@sandcreekgreenway.org.

***Jill Boice**, who joined DFO in 2001, leads occasional slow-paced field trips. She is also a volunteer raptor monitor at Cherry Creek State Park*





THE LIVES OF BIRDS

Day-sleeping masters of camouflage, nightjars are more heard than seen



Freckled Nightjars in perfect camouflage on ground in Uganda
Nik Borrow / Flickr



Common Nighthawk on ground in Oklahoma
Delaine Kelley / Creative Commons



Common Poorwill in Denver City Park in 2024
Patrick O'Driscoll

Jared Del Rosso

Here's one thing that every birder knows about nightjars (Family *Caprimulgidae*, “the Goatsuckers”): You're more likely to hear them than see them.

They are, after all, “secretive” birds. During the day, nightjars — our Colorado locals are Common Poorwill and Common Nighthawk — are usually inactive and hidden, concealing themselves on forest floors, tree branches, or rocky ground. With feathering that resembles pebbles, lichens, or rotting wood, nightjars match their nesting habitats just so. They may seem uncommon or rare, but they are found everywhere except Antarctica and a few island groups.

Not only have these wide-mouthed twilight fliers perfected camouflage, they have also refined its use. A [2017 study](#) found that three kinds of nightjars — Mozambique, Pennant-winged, and Fiery-necked — better matched the backgrounds they chose for roosting than any others. Whether all nightjars do this blending in is unclear. But photos of many nightjars show how well they disappear into their background.

In this regard, the photo here of two Freckled Nightjars (*Caprimulgus tristigma*) in Uganda is especially compelling. The one in front virtually vanishes into its rocky habitat. The white “flakes” of lichen or light-colored stone match perfectly the lightly speckled feathering of this bird.

Invisible by day, nightjars remain difficult to encounter at night. Some, including Common Poorwill, are most active at the end of dusk. Light is low, trails are closed, and our human imaginations — still just a little afraid of the dark and who or what lurks within it — can get the best of us.

Besides being secretive, shy and reclusive, nightjars are also more scarce than they used to be. Across most of the US and Canada, breeding populations of

Continued on page 32

nighthawks, Whip-poor-wills, and Chuck-will's-widows have tanked precipitously — more than 50%. Although Colorado isn't exempt from this trend, we seem to be losing poorwills and nighthawks at a slower rate. Between *Colorado Breeding Bird Atlases I and II*, observations of breeding Common Nighthawks declined by about 20%. Total Common Poorwill observations declined by about 10%.

All told, nightjars are difficult to find, nearly impossible to spot, and challenging just to add to our yearly bird lists. Often it takes a special trip to niche nightjar habitat to encounter a poorwill or nighthawk.

But there's another secret these birds keep from us: They're not nearly as reclusive as we think. When cold spring rains compel migrating birds to spend a night in backyards, alleys and streets around Denver and its suburbs, think of it as "poorwill weather." Amid or immediately after a cold, mid-to-late-May rain, go looking for poorwills — in mulch piles between trees, in rocky gardens, anywhere on the ground and seemingly out of the way where they can blend in.

This year, Denver had days of poorwill weather in late May, including a torrential rain on May 25 that brought a poorwill into my Centennial yard. I'd have missed him had I not stepped into the kitchen to make lunch just as he swooped low through the yard, within view. His white-tipped tail and warm browns were visible in flight, but once the bird entered the complex coverage of trees and shrubs at the edge of my yard, he disappeared.

If nightjar weather is typical, where the birds land is not. Migrating poorwills even show up in downtown Denver. When I shared my report of that backyard bird to the CoBirds list-serv, DFO's own **Mike Fernandez** replied that he'd recently encountered one downtown during a "Lights Out Denver" bird window-strike survey. The poorwill in his photo was alive and fine, looking at ease on a patch of sidewalk. Somehow its feathering matched a low rock wall in the background.

During these on-the-ground stopovers, Common Poorwills generally tolerate passersby, though they'll likely flush if approached directly. But a steady, passing stream of oblivious people is nothing to a poorwill. Particularly on cold mornings, poorwills may remain hunkered down indefinitely. This allows anyone with a camera, birder or not, to snap clear and close-up photos of them in surprising locations. I've seen pictures of Common Poorwills on Facebook, Nextdoor and iNaturalist, roosting on cars, sidewalks, and the edges of garden boxes and patios.

Common Nighthawks are a bit different. Because of their high, crepuscular flights (in evening and morning twilight) over open spaces, water, and cities, people see them more often than Common Poorwills,



Common Poorwill, asleep on ground in downtown Denver near Coors Field
Elizabeth Goetz



Continued on page 33

whose behaviors are less conspicuous. Still, it can be as hard to notice or spot a roosting nighthawk as it is a poorwill. Nighthawks sometimes rest on fence posts and branches, particularly on the Plains east of Denver. But like poorwills, nighthawks can easily blend into their surrounding habitat. Good luck spotting one perched high in a tree canopy after leaf-out! And ground-roosting nighthawks can disappear into sand and stone just as easily as a poorwill can.

Though they can be difficult to find, nighthawks do not avoid living among us. As late spring turns to summer, Common Nighthawks begin nesting, sometimes on flat, gravel-covered roofs in cities (a behavior first documented in 1869). Biologists speculate that nighthawk populations may have increased as humans used gravel to cover more roofs. Unfortunately for Common Nighthawks, gravel has fallen out of fashion as a roofing material in American cities. That change in our built environment may be a factor in the species' decline.

Common Nighthawks aren't the only such roof-nesters. In Taiwan, the [Savanna Nightjar](#) began nesting on urban roofs about two decades ago. But its nighttime vocalizations are so loud and intrusive — *Birds of the World* describes the racket as “a loud, raspy note *cheek!* or *tschreep!* repeated for long periods” — that they keep some people up too late and roust others from sleep way too early. Perhaps to forestall extreme measures to control or remove the birds, conservationists in Taiwan preach peaceful coexistence. They ask that people use their rooftops regularly to hang laundry or conduct other activities to dissuade nightjars from nesting there. Agricultural and science authorities even collaborated on posters to promote this strategy.

People in the eastern US can relate. Whip-poor-wills there are notoriously vociferous. Their scientific name says so: *Antrostomus vociferous*, Latin for “clamorous cavern-mouth.” Although **Henry David Thoreau** wished in [his own journal](#) that everyone could sleep “where you may hear the whip-poor-will in your dreams,” not everyone shared his enthusiasm. More than a century ago, the species was so common that sleepless nights were ensured around homes in the East. A [1907 article in the *Washington Times*](#) even told of a man so annoyed by a Whip-poor-will that he shot at it three times and missed. In a final indignity, the bird landed on his gun barrel and sang.

I can't confirm if that story is real or apocryphal, but the Whip-poor-will as a nuisance had enough cultural currency to inspire

writer **James Thurber**'s dark, Hitchcockian 1941 short story, “[The Whip-poor-will](#).” Thurber's sleepless human protagonist is driven murderously mad by days of unending Whip-poor-will song.

As Whip-poor-will populations have declined, the species keeps fewer people awake. But wherever the birds endure, so too does their song. Despite closed windows, I've heard an especially vocal one continue his song well past midnight under a full moon in May. And I still hear from people back East who are kept awake by Whip-poor-wills.

Whether nighthawk, poorwill or Whip-poor-will, nightjars will never be as familiar as our common backyard birds. We'll never witness their familial dramas the way we do those of robins, chickadees, and magpies.

But we shouldn't mistake our inability to spot them regularly for a species quirk. Who among us doesn't sometimes wish to be like a nightjar, spending spring and summer afternoons hidden away in difficult-to-reach places, keeping company with songbirds, oaks, and silent stones? Nightjars are neither recluses nor curmudgeons . . . or, at least, no more so than many of us birders, myself included.

The Lives of Birds is a recurring feature by DFO member and birder **Jared Del Rosso**, a wildflower gardener and sociologist with a special interest in urban and suburban nature. He's also writing a book about Whip-poor-wills in American culture. Read more at his blog [The Lonesome Whip-poor-will](#).



Common Nighthawk on fence post in rural Nevada
Patrick O'Driscoll



FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

April, May, June DFO trips *In Focus*

Field trips in the three spring-into-summer months included 81 total outings. Of those, participants on 34 trips took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 90-year-old club (plus one late trip from March). If you’re on DFO trips in July, August and September, take a few shots of your fellow birders birding and send us the best for the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, coming out in early October. Send .JPG or .PNG photo files of birders in the field, with date/location of trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline for our October 2025 fall-quarter issue is **Tuesday, Sept. 30**. Thanks!



MARCH 30

Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams County)

Leader

Jason B. Bidgood

Participants

Dave Prentice, Jayne James, Matthew Fast, Lisa Seiler, Michelle Trotter, Debra Lentz, John Batt, Lynn Slaga, Scott Hammel

Birders on March 30 field trip to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR zero in on Greater Yellowlegs and Yellow-headed Blackbirds at Lake Ladora

(Dave Prentice)

TRIP REPORT



APRIL 7

Southeastern Colorado (Lincoln, Elbert)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Scott Hammel, Dave Prentice, Kenneth Stuckey, Diane Roberts, Ann Christensen, Debra Strike, Melody Serra, Susan Blansett, Linda Purcell, Phil Waltz

Birders scan the prairie for Mountain Plovers April 7 on joint DFO-Denver Audubon field trip to southeastern Colorado. Several seen from some distance included one with multi-colored ID bands on its legs. Other sightings included Burrowing Owl, Sage Thrasher and close comparison view of both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs. In Karval, a local farmer who stopped to talk was amazed that a group from Denver travel so far just to see birds

(Linda Purcell)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 35



APRIL 12

Clear Spring Ranch Regional Park (El Paso)

Leader

Megan Miller

Participants

Diane Wilson, Andrea Duran, Lorraine Watry, Joe Chen, Dale Stevens, Mary Crimmins, Max Gowen, Joseph Gowen

Field trippers on joint DFO-Aiken Audubon outing April 12 to Clear Spring Ranch and Fountain Creek Nature Center in El Paso County. Bird highlights included Snow Goose, Long-billed Curlew, White-faced Ibis and Eastern Phoebe

(Joe Chen)

TRIP REPORT



APRIL 13

Northeastern Colorado (Washington, Morgan, Weld)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Michelle Trotter, Chris Best, Jason Zolle, Ross Terhaar, Kenneth Stuckey, Robert and Jennifer Tonge, John Batt, Jenny Germano, Brady Anderson, Victoria Miles

Birding in all directions at Lower Latham during an April 13 field trip to three northeastern Colorado counties. Despite constant windiness, the group saw their target species, Greater Prairie Chicken, on a small lek in Washington County, in addition to a lot of different birds (a seasonally late Northern Shrike among them

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST

See "Past Trips" page

Continued on page 36



APRIL 15-17

Southeastern Colorado (Pueblo, Otero, Las Animas, Baca, Crowley, Douglas)

Leaders

Gary Witt and David Suddjian

Participants

Dave Prentice, Ryan Corda, Kenneth Stuckey, Winston Liu, Anne Craig, Judy McKeon

Birders on 3-day field trip April 15-17 to southeastern Colorado trek along the chalky edge of Lake Cheraw in Otero County on successful search for Snowy Plovers. The trip recorded 101 species on 57 eBird checklists

(Dave Prentice)

CHECKLIST

See "Past Trips" page



APRIL 23

First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch (Denver)

Leaders

Carly Crow

Participants

Jodi Haller, Joe Chen, Diane Hutton, Colleen Nunn

DFO field trippers zero in on a bird during April 23 outing to First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch in Denver

(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 37



APRIL 26

Birds + iNaturalist, Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams)

Leaders

Laura Steadman and Archer Silverman

Participants

Andrea Duran, Colleen Nunn, Jodi Haller, Susan Shamos, Andrew Dolan, Sue Combs, Emily Braker, Joe Chen

Birders pause to focus on a distant bird along the Lake Ladora trail during April 26 DFO trip to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. This Birds + field trip also focused on how to use iNaturalist, the app and web platform that help document the natural world (plants, animals, bugs, even birds), share community science data with biologists, and identify flora and fauna with help from AI and other users
(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST



APRIL 26

Tucker Gulch, Golden (Jefferson)

Leader

Ryan Corda

Participants

David Suddjian, Shay Lyons, Virginia Gulakowski, Timothy Condon, Linnea Bjorkman, Paige Asmann, Jamie Pace, Victoria Miles, Catherine Millard

Birders on trail at Tucker Gulch in Golden on April 26 afternoon field trip, new leader Ryan Corda's first. Among birds recorded were Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped Warblers, House Wren, goldfinches and Pine Siskin, a Say's Phoebe with a nest, and more
(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 38



APRIL 27

Audubon Kingery Nature Center (Jefferson)

Leaders

Jordan Gerue and Jason Bidgood

Participants

Jason Bidgood, Paige Asmann, Jamie Pace, Kelly Hollar, Lesly Baesens, Larry Sykes, Erin and Eric Hoffmeyer, Morgan Kahle, Bruce Raff

Field trippers pause along South Platte River during April 27 outing to the Audubon Kingery Nature Center south of Chatfield SP.

The joint field trip with Denver Audubon was the first led by newly certified DFO trip leader Jordan Gerue

(Jason Bidgood)

CHECKLIST



APRIL 27

Staunton State Park (Jefferson)

Leaders

Timothy Condon and David Suddjian

Participants

Lynn Slaga, Matthew Fast, Jacob Castonguay, Chip Dawes, Michelle Trotter, Kris Saucke, Sue Summers, Cynthia Breidenbach, Elizabeth Wu, Coreen Spellman

All eyes are on a distant owl during April 27 field trip to Staunton SP. Tim Condon's first time leading a DFO field trip followed the Davis Ponds loop. The group saw many birds seeking cavities in aspens to nest: Red-naped and Williamson's sapsuckers, Western Bluebirds, singing Ruby-crowned Kinglets and more

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 39



MAY 2

Ponderosa Preserve, Aurora (Arapahoe)

Leader

Cynthia Cestkowski

Participants

Rosanne Juergens, Mark and Leopoldine Berkstresser, Kris Saucke, Marie Mager, Dee Sato, Catherine Millard, Joe Chen, Kevin Millard, Christine Macdonald

Birders scan the terrain during May 2 field trip at Ponderosa Preserve, the restricted-entry City of Aurora site that protects a native stand of Ponderosa pine at the northernmost reach of the Black Forest on Colorado's eastern Plains. Periodically, DFO field trips visit this island of natural habitat in the state's third-largest city to add to its baseline of birds documented via eBird hotspot
(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST 1

CHECKLIST 2



MAY 2-4

Southeastern Colorado campout trip (Bent, Crowley, Douglas, Otero, Prowers, Pueblo)

Leader

Laura Steadman

Participants

Melissa Mezger, Michelle Trotter, Kate and Mike Gaylord, Lara Cueni, Karen and Dan Clark, Jenny Germano, Eileen Holcomb, Christopher Curwen, Colleen Nunn, Mark Winfrey

Participants in May 2-4 field trip to southeastern Colorado gather by the fire in Lake Hasty group campground below the dam at John Martin Reservoir after a day of birding. Although spring migration was barely underway, the group recorded 117 species, including Great Horned Owls calling from campground cottonwoods, Wild Turkey and Bobwhite wakeup calls, and hundreds of phalaropes on Hasty
(Eileen Mennecke)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 40



MAY 7

Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams)

Leader

Carly Crow

Participants

Paula Rosson, Joe Chen, Susan Shetterly, Joseph Margoshes, Nathan Crow, Jayne James, Lynn Sauer, Cliff Hendrick, Colleen Nunn, Kenneth Stuckey, Kris Tita, Nadiyah Watts, Kelsey Robb, Jeff Price

Field trippers scope and scan Lower Derby Lake during May 7 field trip to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR in search of species on spring migration through the Denver area

(Joe Chen)

TRIP REPORT



MAY 9

Weld County hotspots (Adams, Weld)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Gary Witt, Sandy Blair, Robert Przybylo, Andrea Duran, Joe Chen

Birders scope from the roadside on a multi-stop field trip May 9 through the Kersey region of Weld County. Shorebirds were the outing's principal target, and conditions were especially good at Loloff Reservoir and the western pond at Road 59. Highlights included Pectoral Sandpiper (uncommon in spring), Stilt Sandpipers, and hundreds of phalaropes

(Joe Chen)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 41



MAY 10

Tucker Gulch (Jefferson)

Leader

Ryan Corda

Participants

Lynn Slaga, Eileen Warner, Kris Tita, Gary Witt, Scott and Jennifer Hatch, Nadiyah Watts

DFO birders zero in on one of several highlights during morning outing May 10 in Tucker Gulch in Golden. Although it felt a little quiet for spring migration, nice moments included a Cooper's Hawk adding to its nest, a group of newly arrived Lazuli Buntings, a pair of nesting Say's Phoebes, and a female Black-headed Grosbeak

(Ryan Corda)

TRIP REPORT



MAY 12-14

Southeast Colorado (Baca, Bent, Crowley, Douglas, Kiowa, Otero, Prowers, Pueblo)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Melody Serra, John Batt, Walt Combs, Mary Beth Searles, Sharon Kelly, Oliver Urdiales, Christopher Curwen

Participants in DFO spring migration field trip May 12-14 to southeastern Colorado pose at the Willow Creek Nature Trail sign at Lamar Community College, one of numerous stops on the three-day outing

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 42



MAY 15-26

2025 SE Arizona Trip (15 counties in AZ, CO, NM)

Leader

Joey Kellner

Participants

Denise Reznicek, Courtney Rella, Sue Summers, Betsy Goodwin, Jennifer and Robert Tonge, Bill Turner

Trip leader Joey Kellner (left) points out a Lesser Bittern from a boardwalk in Bosque del Apache NWR in central New Mexico on May 26. It was one of the final stops on DFO's 12-day, 2,773-mile trip to southeast Arizona's "Sky Islands" and other points in neighboring states (Denise Reznicek)

TRIP REPORT

147 checklists



MAY 17-18

Common Poorwill Evenings, Ken Caryl Ranch (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

(May 17) Gabby Licht, Lauren Friesen, Ryan Corda, Coreen Spellman, Elaine Friesen, Christine Macdonald; (May 18) Celia Moynihan, Sharon and Lance Tanaka, Dee Sato, Christopher and Catherine Barr

Birders listen for some of the 11 Common Poorwills heard (three of them seen) on May 17 evening field trip in the hogbacks at Ken Caryl Ranch. Those on a second trip the next evening heard 16 poorwills. Trip leader David Suddjian has led 35 such trips at this Jefferson County location since 2018, marking "lifer" records of the species for an estimated 270 birders

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST 1

CHECKLIST 2

Continued on page 43



MAY 19

Louviers Open Space (Douglas)

Leaders

Julia Gwinn and David Suddjian

Participants

Bonnie Prado, Eileen Warner,
Kathy Holland, Kris T, Michelle
Verostko, Phil Waltz, Shay Lyons,
Virginia Gulakowski

**DFO field trippers focus off-trail
during May 19 outing in Louviers
Open Space in Douglas County**

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST



MAY 19

Denver City Park (Denver)

Leader

Patrick O'Driscoll

Participants

Mike and Karen Fernandez, Linda Purcell, Brian Wolfe, Natasha Albert, Ryan Corda, Steve Methven,
Sandra Hoyle, Maggie Gibson

**Birders focus on a bright male Western Tanager in a spruce tree during May 19 field trip in
Denver City Park. The group found 43 species across the park, including Black-crowned Night
Herons that have returned to the nesting island in Ferril Lake for the first time since 2019**

(Patrick O'Driscoll)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 44



MAY 24

Genesee Mountain Park (Jefferson)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Judy McKeon

Participants

Bonnie Prado, Nadiyah Watts, Bruce Raff, Joe Chen, Kris Saucke, Lynn Slaga, Cassandra Stroud, Kelsey Robb

Birders look high into classic Ponderosa pine forest on May 24 field trip to Genesee Mountain Park. Sightings included Olive-sided Flycatcher, a Broad-tailed Hummingbird nest, Western Tanager, Western Bluebird, Green-tailed Towhees, a pair of Townsend's Solitaires and many House Wrens. Although late in May, some species seemed to be just arriving. There were few pewees, no Empidonax, and only single Plumbeous Vireo and Black-headed Grosbeak

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST



MAY 26

Deer Creek Canyon (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Cassandra Stroud, Jonathan and Angela Hebel, Coreen Spellman, Virginia Gulakowski, Ryan Corda, Nadiyah Watts

All eyes on the skies during May 26 field trip to various hotspots in Jefferson County's Deer Creek watershed. From mist to clearing and back to clouds, field trippers enjoyed a cross-section birds from forest to wet meadow, including Wilson's Snipe, Savannah Sparrow, both bluebirds, Williamson's Sapsucker, Ovenbird, Virginia's Warbler, Plumbeous Vireo, White-throated Swift and more

(Ryan Corda)

CHECKLISTS

See "Past Trips" page

Continued on page 45



MAY 28

Cherry Creek State Park (Arapahoe)

Leader

Timothy Condon

Participants

Joe Chen, Colleen Nunn, Kris Tita, Elizabeth Wu, Brian Wolfe, Nadiyah Watts, Virginia Gulakowski, Alison Bishop, Jordan Carpenter, Victor Doty, Jack Kurlinski

Picturesque stormy skies frame field trippers on DFO's May 28 outing to Cherry Creek State Park
(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST 1

CHECKLIST 2



MAY 29

Eastern Boulder County (Boulder)

Leader

Peter Ruprecht

Participants

Joe Chen, Karen Bellina, Marjorie Middleton, Susan Blansett, Dee Patterson, Christie Owens

Peter Ruprecht leads field trippers on a birding walk May 29 in eastern Boulder County's Cherryvale and West Davidson Mesa areas. Sightings included Savannah Sparrow, Bobolink, Cedar Waxwing, orioles and American Kestrel. Also amazing wildflowers and one enormous but unidentified bird footprint

(Marjorie Middleton)

CHECKLIST 1

CHECKLIST 2



MAY 29

Lowell Ponds Open Space (Adams)

Leaders

Patrick O'Driscoll and Linda Purcell

Participants

Virginia Gulakowski, Jodi Haller, Debra Lentz, Michelle Stringer

Binoculars are trained on a distant pair of American Avocets during DFO's May 29 field trip to Lowell Ponds Open Space, a club first to this underbirded location. Among 42 species were Great Egret, American Avocet, Wood Duck, Lazuli Bunting, Yellow Warblers and hundreds of Cliff Swallows. The day was overcast but dry between storms in an unusually rainy May
(Patrick O'Driscoll)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 46



JUNE 1

Pine Valley Ranch (Jefferson)

Leader

Timothy Condon

Participants

Matthew Fast, Paula Rosson, Brian Huculak, Jamie Pace, Paige Asmann, Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine, Michelle Verostko, Sharon Tinianow, William Knapp, Jacob Castonguay

Birders on June 1 field trip to Pine Valley Ranch in Jefferson County, where the outing recorded 29 species, including a Chestnut-sided Warbler

(Timothy Condon)

CHECKLIST



JUNE 6

Birds + Museum Collection, Denver City Park (Denver)

Leader

Ryan Corda

Participants

Lorissa Argo Ray, Jodi Haller, Tim McAuliffe, Becky Russell, Judith Cohen, Eileen Warner, Debra Lentz

Participants in June 6 Birds-Plus outing to Denver City Park visit the ornithology collection in the Denver Museum of Nature & Science on the park grounds. After the museum tour, the group birded the park in late afternoon for about 25 minutes before thunderstorms cut the bird walk short

(Ryan Corda)

CHECKLIST



JUNE 9

Birds + Trees, Mount Blue Sky & Scenic Byway (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Tiffany Willis, John Batt, Jason Zolle, Marjorie Middleton, Julia Gwinn, Michelle Verostko, Bonnie Prado, Melody Serra, Oliver Urdiales

DFO field trippers focus high in a grove of aspen during June 9 Birds + Trees joint outing with Denver Audubon in the Mount Blue Sky region. The group learned to identify nine conifer species in roadside stops along Colorado 103

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLISTS

See "Past Trips" page

Continued on page 47



JUNE 10

Bailey Nesting Area (Summit)

Leaders

Paul Slingsby and Chris Blakeslee

Participants

Joe Chen, Judy Lane, Mary Fran O'Connor, Bill Schreitz, Isaac Ho

Lunch break at meadow's edge during June 10 DFO field trip to Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area in Summit County. Paul Slingsby and Chris Blakeslee have led this trip to the nesting area each summer to record species numbers. The area was established in 1971 with DFO's involvement to honor Bailey, who became director of the Colorado Museum of Natural History (now DMNS) in 1936, the year after the Colorado Bird Club (now Denver Field Ornithologists) was founded 90 years ago this year
(Joe Chen)

TRIP REPORT



JUNE 11

Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams)

Leader

George Ho

Participants

Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine, Nancy Crowley, Jodi Haller, Joe Chen, Alexander Dalton, Debra Lentz, Rae Jones, Virginia Gulakowski, Corrine Kuhl, Erica Sodos

Participants in June 11 DFO field trip to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR use the birdwatching blind at the Gun Club Pond to scan for waterfowl and other birds
(George Ho)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 48



JUNE 12-13

Tamarack Ranch SWA (Washington, Logan)

Leader

Gary Witt

Participants

Anne Craig, Judy McKeon, Joe Chen, Kenneth Stuckey, Isaac Ho, Ann Christensen, Betty Glass

Birders on trail in Tamarack Ranch SWA during June 12-13 overnight DFO trip to northeastern Colorado
(Joe Chen)

CHECKLISTS

See "Past Trips" page



JUNE 14

Birds + Scientific Collections Tour, Boulder Creek / CU Boulder (Boulder)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Emily Braker

Participants

Bonnie Prado, Matthew Fast, Zak Hepler, Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine, Shai Ronen, Brian Wolfe, Nicole Callaway

Emily Braker, Collections Manager of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, hosts DFO Birds + outing on June 14. After birding along Boulder Creek on the CU Boulder campus, the field trippers visited the museum to see and learn about its vast collection of bird skins and numerous other specimens from nature

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST 1

CHECKLIST 2

Continued on page 49



JUNE 17

Audubon Kingery Nature Center (Jefferson)

Leaders

Ryan Dibala and David Suddjian

Participants

Amy Manning, Katherine Peterson, Coreen Spellman, Angela Grun, Sarah Slater, Marjorie Middleton, Gina Neptune, Kathy Drake, Jodi Haller, Natasha Albert

Participants zero in during joint DFO/Denver Audubon field trip June 17 at Audubon Kingery Center along the South Platte River. The trip, a first as leader for Ryan Dibala, focused on birding by ear. But Ryan's good eye also found an American Redstart nest, with the male nearby

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST



JUNE 24

Cherry Creek State Park (Arapahoe)

Leaders

Ethan Cleveland and Cynthia Cestkowski

Participants

Joe Chen, Melody Serra, Sarah Franklin, Larry Wilson, Tegan Masoero-Palmer, Morgan Kahle

Birding from the marshland edge of Cherry Creek Reservoir near Pelican Point during June 24 field trip to Cherry Creek SP

(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 50



JUNE 27

South Platte Park (Arapahoe)

Leaders

Cynthia Breidenbach and Julia Gwinn

Participants

Virginia Gulakowski, Robert Mitchell, Joe Chen, Alayna Nelson,
Sara Jepsen, Suzann Edwards, Joan Hollenbach, Kris Saucke

Binocs and scopes focus on birds along South Platte River on June 27 field trip to South Platte Park

(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST

Welcome to new DFO members

Karen Bauer, Denver; Mark Berkstresser, Aurora; Ethan
Cleveland, Denver; Brian Cumalander and Julianna Williams,
Littleton; Jeffrey Darkis and Carole Durst, Aurora; Barbara
Horvath, Wheat Ridge; Jeff Reock and Jennifer Hendzlik,
Frederick

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Brady Anderson, Karen Bauer, Pete and Ann Christensen,
Dee Sato, Howard Leon Smiler

Friends of DFO

Colleen Bergquist, Jeremy Nichols,
Howard Leon Smiler

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Howard Leon Smiler



DFO NEXT GEN

Looking ahead, starting 'em young



As Denver Field Ornithologists looks ahead to future decades in this 90th anniversary year of the club, this 4-year-old granddaughter of DFO member A.J. Gest may have her future in sight as a next-generation birder, too.

Photo: A.J. Gest



LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Third time, more charms: Late migration in drought stirs birding magic in “Sky Islands”

The trip: Southeast Arizona Sky Islands III / CO, AZ, NM

Dates: Thursday, May 15 – Monday, May 26

Leader: Joey Kellner + 7 participants

Species: 227 on 147 eBird checklists

EBIRD TRIP REPORT

Vermilion Flycatcher in flight
Courtney Rella

Joey Kellner

On Day One's long drive to Tucson from Denver, we could sense that this third consecutive DFO spring excursion to the desert Southwest would look, feel, and be different. Entering southeastern Arizona's "Sky Islands" region on Interstate 10 west, the landscape looked cooked. We were in the Chihuahuan Desert, of course, with the Sonoran just ahead. But as far as we could see, grasses and plants that should have been green in mid-May were dry, dead and often leafless.

This is how deserts deal with drought. Native plants like acacia, and even higher elevation oaks, had dropped their leaves to conserve water, a strategy quite evident to us. But by the end of our first full day of birding, we saw something else at work, too: Spring migration, always weeks earlier than we see in Colorado, was still going on!

We were finding late migrants daily in all habitats. After tallying just under 195 species in identical 12-day expeditions in 2023 and 2024, this year we recorded an amazing 227 species. Was it the drought? Late migration? Maybe both. Were migrants lingering because they needed more time to find enough food in the damaged landscape to build fat reserves to continue their long journey north?

Continued on page 53



Mexican Spotted Owl
Joey Kellner



2025 Sky Islands crew, L to R, Joey Kellner, Bill Turner, Robert and Jennifer Tonge, Sue Summers, Denise Reznicek, Betsy Goodwin, Courtney Rella



Night shot of Elf Owl in cavity
Courtney Rella



Varied Bunting
Courtney Rella



Blue Grosbeak in unusual molt
Joey Kellner

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK *cont from page 52*

We found Western Tanagers not only in the mountains where they breed but also along the lowland courses of the San Pedro and Santa Cruz rivers, and even out in the dry scrublands of the Sonoran and Chihuahuan. Warblers that should have been far north in or near their breeding grounds — Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned, Wilson's, Townsend's, Hermit, and Grace's — were still scratching around southern Arizona for more flight fuel. Black-headed Grosbeaks were still present in unheard-of numbers. (We recorded 107!) Other species unusual for mid-late May included a beautiful Red Phalarope, two Snowy Plover, Brewer's Sparrow, Least Tern, and American Golden-Plover.

And yet, even as drought gave us more birds, it took away others we had seen in the two previous May trips: Common Black Hawk, Mexican Chickadee, Mississippi Kite, and only a single Sulphurbellied Flycatcher (and not everyone got a look). In side chats with local birders in southeastern Arizona, one mentioned that Elf Owl, an iconic Sonoran species, was almost two weeks late this spring.

Physical conditions for birding were quite nice this year: mild days, sunny or high overcast, with highs in the 80s and low 90s, below-normal heat for mid-late May. If the birds and the weather treated us well, vehicular speed bumps were inevitable. Each of our cars suffered a flat tire, though the effect on our travels was minimal.

As always, luck, habitat and our collective birding knowledge helped find harder-to-get species. We could not locate a Varied Bunting that had been showing up at a water feature in the must-visit [Paton Center for Hummingbirds](#) in Patagonia, AZ. But from decades of previous experiences, I knew where else we might find one — and we found three there! Luck was also with us. On our planned arrival at the [George Walker House](#), a feeder-watch landmark in the species-rich Paradise and Portal, AZ area, a banded White-eared Hummingbird that had been seen there the previous three years arrived the day before to welcome us. Luck and some hiking also gave us unforgettable looks at a pair of Flame-colored Tanagers in Miller Canyon and an Elegant Trogon in Madera Canyon.

Geographical good fortune is what makes southeastern Arizona a mecca for so many species of birds regularly found nowhere else and seldom seen farther north. The Sky Islands are just that: isolated pockets of high ground and superior mountain habitat where the north end of Mexico's rugged Sierra Madre cordillera pokes into Arizona's corner of the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts. The cooler forested lands above the hotter sea of grass and desert shrubs below attract the birds — and thus, the birders.

Continued on page 54

The group of eight for my third straight May expedition included **Betsy Goodwin** and fellow DFO members **Courtney Rella**, **Denise Reznicek**, **Sue Summers**, **Bill Turner**, and **Jennifer** and **Robert Tonge**. Across 12 days, we logged 2,773 road miles, stayed in seven different accommodations (including two “in-habitat” lodges), and convened nightly over dinner to review the day’s birds with custom, tri-fold cardstock checklists I created for each trip participant for the occasion. It became both a bonding ritual and a way to sketch out backup plans for the next day to find species we had expected but missed.

Thanks to all of them for another great trip. But don’t take my word for it. Read on as several of them tell you, in their own words.

First-timer in Sky Islands hopes to return

When we saw the DFO listing for **Joey Kellner**’s southeastern Arizona trip back in 2022, my sister **Jennifer** and I knew we’d want to go birding there someday. When we were ready to give it a go, great luck chose us in the drawing for spots on DFO’s 2025 excursion. Joey’s warnings about desert heat, rocky roads, and even the risk of valley fever were hardly deterrents against the chance for 40 life-bird species, 12 days of picturesque Southwest landscapes, and nighttime spotlighting for snakes, lizards and other “herps.”

Setting off for Arizona at 5 a.m. on May 15, we were soon tallying every bird as we drove (**Courtney Rella** kept a slew of incidental checklists). That early start got us down to the desert in time to reach Lake Cochise outside Willcox, AZ, an ancient playa where the birding started with a bang: shorebirds, ducks and more, including a Red Phalarope female in breeding plumage.

As we went, we kept finding birds Joey didn’t think we’d see: Black-chinned Sparrows on Mount Lemmon, Hermit Warblers all over the place, Tropical Kingbirds and Thick-billed Kingbirds together, and a White-eared Hummingbird. Listening to the locals, we suspected our luck was because widespread drought had delayed arrivals and departures of early migrants we wouldn’t normally see. Lack of water also meant fewer active reptiles on our night cruises for herps.

But throughout the trip, Joey’s accounts of the birds, plants and animals (and where to find them) were exceptional.

Continued on page 55



Purple Martins atop
blooming saguaro cactus
Denise Reznicek



Red-faced Warbler
Denise Reznicek



Tracking a woodpecker building a nest in
a saguaro cactus at Saguaro National Park
Jennifer Tonge



Blue-throated Mountain-gem at feeder
Courtney Rella



Listening and watching for warblers
on Mount Lemmon north of Tucson
Jennifer Tonge

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK *cont from page 54*

Long-lived saguaro cactuses only start to grow arms at about age 50. For a Berylline Hummingbird, go in evening to [Santa Rita Lodge](#) in Madera Canyon, AZ, but for a Blue-throated Mountain Gem, head for [Portal, AZ](#). For a Tropical Kingbird, you need an unexpected source of water, which Joey led us to on the Santa Gertrudis trail south of Tumacácori.

My favorite encounter was three owl species (Elf Owl, Western Screech-Owl, Whiskered Screech-Owl) all calling at once in the night at Santa Rita Lodge. Owls are my favorites, so of course my trip highlights were seeing Elf Owl and Mexican Spotted Owl. Learning how the Sonoran and Chihuahuan desert habitats differ, and seeing Mount Lemmon, the Chiricahuas, the Huachucas, and Madera Canyon rise out of them, I came to understand why “Sky Islands” is such an apt term. I’m already thinking of going back someday — perhaps one August after the monsoons to see other hummingbirds and migrants from Mexico.

— **Robert Tonge**, *Denver*

Day after day, vivid birding moments

We knew the trip would be special when, arriving at Lake Cochise, our first bird was an uncommon one: Bendire’s Thrasher. The lake just off I-10 about 80 miles from Tucson served a smorgasbord of shorebirds — Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, American Golden Plover, Red Phalarope, Stilt Sandpiper . . . you get the idea. My favorite? Long-billed Curlew — that oversized, curved bill makes me smile every time.

The eastern half of Saguaro National Park at 6 in the morning is absolutely stunning. The rising sun on the scrub oak, ocotillo and saguaro cactus was heavenly. I had never seen saguaros in bloom. So delicate yet tough, their blossoms defied the desert sun, heat and dryness.

South of there, we walked the trails around [Santa Rita Lodge](#), watched the lodge bird feeders, and found the spectacular Elegant Trogon. Even farther south, our stop at Peña Blanca Lake included a picnic dinner with a lake view and an amazing acrobatic display of Lesser Nighthawks having their dinner, too.

In Patagonia, AZ, we had some of the best homemade ice cream ever, minutes away from Tucson Bird Alliance’s Paton Center for Hummingbirds. We should all be grateful for its

Continued on page 56

founders, whose love of nature led them to plant that yard to attract the birds, mammals, and reptiles we saw that day. Another magical highlight was an early morning walk at [San Pedro House](#) near Sierra Vista, AZ. Harsh and lifeless to the untrained eye, the environment there teemed with birds singing, defending territory and nesting.

Crossing over the Chiricahua Mountains was such an adventure. Seeing so many warblers, vireos and the trip's single Mexican Spotted Owl more than made up for flat tires along the way. On the other side, Portal, AZ was everything we were told it would be: an abundance of migrating birds, owls and an elusive Crissal Thrasher.

In the end, the trip's highlight was the guy who led us through the Sky Island landscape. Joey Kellner's abundant enthusiasm and love for southeastern Arizona and its many bird and reptile treasures made our journey something special.

— **Betsy Goodwin**, *Pueblo*

A rock in the road . . . took flight?!

There were lots of great moments and memories, and many incredible sightings. As we drove away one evening from a feeder station outside Portal, AZ, looking for that late-visiting Crissal Thrasher, there instead was a Common Poorwill, motionless in the middle of the road. Joey's quick ID and quicker thinking pulled our cars side by side in both lanes for a better glimpse. To me, it looked like a rock — and then it flew a short distance away.

What a fabulous trip! Joey's enthusiasm and wonderful knowledge of southeastern Arizona were incredible. He goes above and beyond for sure with all the amenities: Food, coolers, water, lodging reservations. So well thought out.

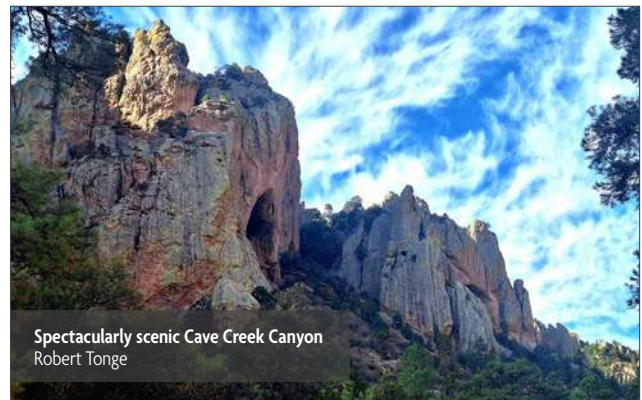
— **Denise Reznicek**, *Centennial*

Dozens of lifers on a bargain excursion

Guided birding expeditions are about half as long and twice the price of this wonderful trip! Joey's love for Arizona shone through. He may say we were lucky, but he knew the habitats and where to search for birds. I had never been to



Mexican Jay watching DFO
birders in Madera Canyon
Robert Tonge



Spectacularly scenic Cave Creek Canyon
Robert Tonge



Pyrrhuloxia and Black-
throated Sparrow at
feeder in Portal, AZ yard
Denise Reznicek



Gambel's Quail in
morning light atop
blooming saguaro
cactus in Saguaro
National Park
Joey Kellner

Continued on page 57

southeastern Arizona (nor birded anywhere in the state), and I had 64 lifers!

Joey was quick to get everyone on a bird as soon as he spotted or heard it. Wherever we went, he engaged other birders and helped them spot birds, too. For us, he took care of everything and made the trip super easy. All we had to do was focus on birding.

The bad drought and unusually slow spring migration were continuing and related themes. The birds' lateness in passing through allowed us to see more species than expected. But it also made some later migrants harder to find. Birds that would have been farther north and nesting were still around, and we worried if their later nesting would succeed. One breeding bird surveyor mentioned that insect and butterfly numbers were dismal, too. When we went "herping" for reptiles at night, there was little to no activity. It's kind of scary to imagine how especially vulnerable species like Mexican Chickadee (already suffering from wildfires) will fare.

Continued on page 58



Lesser Nighthawk
Courtney Rella

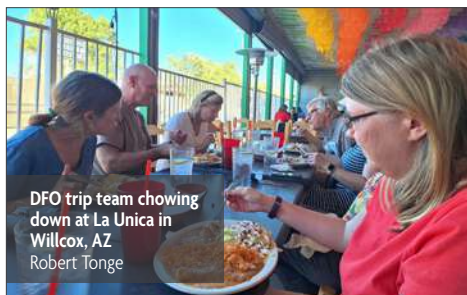


Despite drought, Sonoran
Desert in spring bloom
Robert Tonge

Returning home with great memories, I'll mention two. The day we birded Mount Lemmon in the high country above Tucson, we got to see so many warblers, an experience I hadn't had since living in Ohio. I loved the brilliant flits of their colors through the trees, and jumping from one bird to the next trying to identify them all.

I won't forget waiting in Madera Canyon among a flock of Mexican Jays for the Elegant Trogon to show up. The jays came amazingly close — it was like they were waiting with us! (I realize they were more likely waiting for us to drop food.) The bird feeders at Santa Rita Lodge were amazing. Several times the hummingbirds zoomed past so closely you could feel the air move.

—*Jennifer Tonge, Denver*



DFO trip team chowing down at La Unica in Willcox, AZ
Robert Tonge



Broad-billed Hummingbird
Denise Reznicek

Continued on page 59

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

227 bird species! But look what else we found . . .

Mammals

Ringtail, White-nosed Coati, Javelina, Gray Fox, several species of bat (Pallid, Canyon, Evening, and one of the nectar-feeding species coming to a hummingbird feeder at night), many Coue's Deer, Cliff Chipmunk, Arizona Gray Squirrel, Pocket Gopher, Black-tailed Jackrabbit, Desert Cottontail, Antelope Ground Squirrel, Pronghorn, Striped Skunk and no doubt others we missed

Lizards

Madrean Alligator Lizard, Desert Spiny Lizard, Clark's Spiny Lizard, Yarrow's Spiny Lizard, Desert Grassland Whiptail

Snake

Only ONE? Was it the drought?

Our lone sighting, however, was instantly memorable:

Outside our lodge in Madera Canyon south of Tucson, some in the group found a **Sonoran Whipsnake** hiding in a bush next to the lodge's bird feeders. Then they watched as it CAUGHT and ATE a Broad-billed Hummingbird!



Sonoran Whipsnake taking down Broad-billed Hummingbird near Madera Canyon feeders
Robert Tonge



White-nosed Coati
Robert Tonge

Awed by the birds — and the leader

These 12 days were absolutely fantastic, an epic southeastern Arizona birding trip. Besides the high species count, we had great birding karma, seeing such specialties as Five-striped Sparrow and Varied Bunting, plus unexpecteds like Red Phalarope and Snowy Plover. After a while, we just expected to see what we were looking for — and most of the time, we did.

Seeing an Elf Owl come to a long favored nest site was pure magic. I'll never forget the trek through the woods and up a steep Pinery Canyon incline in the Chiricahuas to see the Mexican Spotted Owl. The Sky Islands already hold such mystique and allure (I've visited four springs in a row), but this time was really special. The plant and animal diversity, the sunrise sun on the cliffs in Cave Creek Canyon, so many dark-sky stars on nights far from light pollution, and knowing that a coati, javelina, or Mexican specialty bird might appear at any moment left me in awe.

Participants on Joey's previous Arizona trips had warned of very early rising and late bedtimes after owling and road cruising for "herps." But after resisting the first urge to roll over at the pre-dawn alarm, it was great to be outdoors in the morning quiet. We got more birds and avoided the worst of the heat, too. All the way along, the amenities and logistics were excellent. I had always wanted to stay at Santa Rita Lodge, and our two nights there were wonderful, from feeders teeming with birds to a roving Ringtail.

Joey Kellner is one organized and knowledgeable dude. I'm grateful to have seen him in action: enthusiastic, confident, and generous with his time and talents. I do not exaggerate to say he is a legend, and DFO is so fortunate that he shares his gifts as a birder and field trip leader with us.

— **Bill Turner**, *Centennial*



Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
**HAPPY MID-SUMMER AND
FALL MIGRATION BIRDING!**

Photo: American Golden Plover
chasing Killdeer at Lake Cochise, AZ
Courtney Rella





THE LARK BUNTING

QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 61 | ISSUE 4 | OCT 2025

DFOBIRDS.ORG

DFO @ 90 HISTORY, PART 4

Renewing, refreshing
DFO in a new century

PAGE 12

DINOSAUR RIDGE

Hawk Watch sets record,
lands \$7.3K grant

PAGE 32

FROM THE FIELD

Trip leader awards honor
frequency, longevity

PAGE 24

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Bluebirds' hole in one
course makes new birdies

PAGE 50



Wood Stork
Kenneth Stuckey
Alexx & Michael's Pond
Broomfield County



ON THE COVER

Nearly a century later, another Front Range visit from the stork (sans baby)



Ken Stuckey, a member of both DFO and Colorado Field Ornithologists, was introduced to the birding

world through frequent encounters with avid birders he met in the field in 2021-22. He is a retired auditor/accountant.

Patrick O'Driscoll

Not every notably rare bird that visits Colorado ends up on the cover of *The Lark Bunting*. Timing, the season of that issue of our quarterly, and the photography itself are among various factors.

But none of that mattered after the feel-good show that unfolded for three weeks this summer at a small suburban Denver pond. The surprise visit by the gawky, fuzzy-headed and charismatic young Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) on this season's cover was simply too good to ignore.

Every rarity has its charms, and we had good ones this summer, from the Yellow Grosbeak in an Estes Park neighborhood to Colorado's first Anhinga in a Boulder County pond. But this bird made some eBirders positively giddy. From mid-August into September, MOBs flocked to [Alexx and Michael's Pond](#) in Broomfield for a species not seen in Colorado for 91 years. Local birder **Matt Hofeditz**, first to spot the pond's unexpected visitor the morning of Aug. 20, began his checklist comments with one word: "Insane."

As that day wore on, the eBird Rare Bird Alert postings got giddier. "Continuing, WOW!!!" one eBirder wrote. "Amazing rarity!" said another. "What a sight — still here @ sunset!" still another marveled. "More birders than birds!" wrote **Vicky Miles**. "I'm actually here for the waterthrush, LOL," joked **Eric DeFonso**. "Thin, spindly legs; pale, somewhat plump body; long, drooping, yellowish beak . . . but enough about me, there was also a Wood Stork!" cracked **John Arthur**.

In the first 24 hours after Hofeditz's find, 192 pond visitors checklisted "Wood Stork" on eBird. Less than a week later, the checklists had passed 500. As the weeks unfolded, uncounted hundreds of non-birders (not of few of them photographers) also visited. By the time the stork was last seen the evening of Sept. 11 by eBirder **Tim Smart**, was there any active Front Range birder who *hadn't* visited the pond to see it?

I confess I did not — because I'd already seen the bird! Three days before it landed in Broomfield, Colorado's third-ever Wood Stork flew into and out of Denver City Park, my birding patch, on Sunday morning, Aug. 17. I saw the bird for barely 2 minutes. Luckily, I had my camera. I snapped a few slightly blurry shots as proof as the juvenile stork circled over Ferril Lake, then continued northwest and out of sight.

After reporting it, I felt kind of guilty that nobody else had seen the super-rarity. So I was elated when Hofeditz re-found the bird three days later, and the parade of happy birders to Alexx & Michael's Pond got rolling.

I usually write something guidebook-y here about the species on our cover (photographed by DFO member **Ken Stuckey** the same morning the Wood Stork reappeared). I could quote *Birds of the World* that this "tactile feeder" catches its food not by sight like herons and egrets, but by feel with its long bill and "foot-stirring" in shallow wetlands. Or I could quote *Birds* that rare sightings like ours here in the West are "presumably" birds dispersing north from Mexico or Central America, not from Florida, Georgia and South Carolina, the birds' US nesting range. I could even delve into the legend of storks delivering babies (thanks to Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale *The Storks*).

But let's just celebrate our happy summer luck to have hosted this alien visitor from another habitat more than a thousand miles away and, we hope, on its way home again.

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of *The Lark Bunting* since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he joined DFO in 2014 and became a field trip leader in 2016



IN THIS ISSUE

2 On the Cover

Nearly a century later, another Front Range visit from the stork (sans baby)

5 From DFO's Perch

As DFO wraps its 90th year, what birding goals are in YOUR next one?

7 DFO News Notes

9 Fall Program Previews

12 DFO @90, Part 4

Meeting, greeting, and field tripping in a new century: 'Bird club' renews and refreshes its decades-old ways

24 From the Field

Here's to those who lead us: the first DFO Field Trip Leader Achievement Awards

26 The Lives of Birds

Autumn yard prep? Doing NOTHING can boost your biodiversity . . . and birds, too

36 Field Trips in Focus

50 Last Word, Last Look

At CommonGround Golf, birdies are . . . blue? Unexpected couple finds a hole in one nestbox

The Lark Bunting, formerly the monthly newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists, is the club's quarterly journal and is published online in January, April, July and October.

DFO On the Wing, the club's digital newsletter, is emailed monthly to all members.

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Submit time-sensitive, month-to-month news items, tips, announcements, photos and other materials to the monthly newsletter's editor at comm@dfobirds.org.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.



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**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

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FROM DFO'S PERCH

As DFO wraps its 90th year, what birding goals are in YOUR next one?

Mary Geder

By the time you read this, we will have had our first in-person DFO program meeting since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 — plus a second, within days of the publishing of this *Lark Bunting*, to celebrate Denver Field Ornithologists' 90th birthday. These September and October milestones were meant to recapture something from our more sociable past. Before Covid, Denver Field Ornithologists members shared monthly evenings together in museum and church meeting places, not in today's convenient but only digitally connected auditorium of live Zoom.

If you're new to these gatherings, we hope you enjoyed the face-to-face storytelling of birding adventures in southeastern Arizona's "Sky Islands" (DFO field trip virtuoso **Joey Kellner** on Sept. 29) and the wonders of today's eBird from *the* most knowledgeable source (co-founder and director **Chris Wood**, a DFO alumnus, on Oct. 13). There will be more opportunities for your feedback, but feel free to express your likes and dislikes now to any and all DFO Board members and to DFO friends and other birders on your next field trip. We welcome your ideas, reviews pro and con, and suggestions for future gatherings. Many thanks to all of you who attended these experimental returns to in-person programming.



Glancing at the calendar, it's hard to believe this issue of *The Lark Bunting* (now quarterly instead of monthly) is our last until 2026. With that in mind, what are you looking forward to in this final quarter of 2025 birding? These come to my mind.

- **Seasonal rarities:** As fall and winter grow colder, be on the lookout for vagrant and rare sightings of birds from the north and west. You may not head into the field thinking about loons, jaegers, unusual waterfowl, Gyrfalcons, Bohemian Waxwings or Snowy Owls, but all of them and more are possible visitors as winter deepens. That's one of the charms of birding, isn't it? YOU NEVER KNOW what you might see
- **Bird counts:** We just finished the DFO-led fall count in September — but dozens of National Audubon Christmas Bird Counts are on the horizon across Colorado, including the mid-December suburban Denver count circle organized by DFO's Kellner. They're all great opportunities to brighten your early winter (Dec. 14 to Jan. 5) with fun group efforts to record bird species diversity and numbers in a more than century-old tradition. Best of all, the Christmas counts welcome birders of all abilities and ages with a warmth of camaraderie and good humor regardless of the temperature outside

And what of 2026? You don't have to make a New Year's resolution out of it, but I like to ask myself this question when the calendar flips forward: What is the one thing I want to accomplish this year in my personal birding?

"Resolution" sounds too much like "must do," so I call this an "expansion" — looking for a new place for my birding to move into. To start your thought process, try using at least three of the old "five W's and one H" (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?).

Continued on page 6

- **What** . . . am I looking to get from my birding? New species? More knowledge of habitats? Detailed observation of specific behaviors? Better skill at ID'ing birdsong?
- **When** . . . will I go birding? Do I want to bird more frequently? Can I make my schedule accommodate that?
- **Where** . . . can I go birding? Where can I find new places to bird? Am I looking for specific birds at specific times? Where can I safely go night birding / owling?

If you've been birding a while, you have probably done this drill many times before. Your birding habits may be well-established: lists (mental or otherwise) of what equipment for which season; smartphone with maps of the known birding world (assuming connectivity in the field); all the apps and guidebooks you need to ID the hard ones; preferred snacks, and maybe even a few dear birding buddies to go with.

Now think about that one thing you need to sharpen that new-year focus. Aside from the "YOU NEVER KNOW" aspect of unexpected sightings, keep also in mind the prospect that "THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW TO LEARN." I've narrowed mine down to two things, but I promise to choose one before New Year's.

Here's wishing all of you a worthy focus for your 2026 birding year. May the rest of your 2025 be filled with good birds and joyful anticipation of more.

— **Mary**

Mary Geder, substitute-writing this year in the "From the President" slot, has held several volunteer posts since joining DFO in the early 2000s. She began work as a US Fish & Wildlife Service biologist before a 30-year career in the oil and gas field. Now retired, she lives in Lakewood



Snowy Owl
John C. Breitsch



Audience members at first
DFO in-person program since
the COVID-19 pandemic
Jim Esten

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

*Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird news, tales from the trail, personal birding adventures (and life birds!), milestones, etc. Email items, photos and any questions to patodrisk@gmail.com.*

NEXT ON BIRD BOMBS: "AUTUMN ID CHALLENGES" OCT. 23

After a summer break, DFO's "BIRD BOMBS" series of bird identification webinars returns on Thursday, Oct. 23, with "Autumn ID Challenges" at 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom. The program, led by DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian**, will focus on identification challenges special to birds migrating in the fall, including loons and scoters in the waterfowl family and most birds of prey. Previous episodes in the BIRD BOMBS series are in a 3-year video archive viewable on the [Past Programs](#) page of the DFO website. They can also be viewed on [DFO's YouTube Channel](#).



REGISTER FOR BIRD BOMBS

LOCAL TEEN'S ROSY-FINCH PROJECT PREPS FOR WINTER

A young Highlands Ranch birder's ambitious project to help preserve vital habitat and food sources for Colorado's native [Brown-capped Rosy-Finches](#) is asking Colorado birders to share their observations of the species this winter. **Grant Brandberg**, age 15, calls his community-science effort the

[Rosy-Finch Winter Project](#)

"a public online survey in which birders, feeders and community members can submit winter feeding locations and sightings." He intends for the data "to help researchers, conservationists and everyday bird lovers learn more about the species' winter ecology, identify threats to the feeding locations, and ensure these critical habitats are protected." Brandberg asks that from now through March, Colorado birders use a [survey form](#) on his website to report their observations. "Every single sighting can help fill in a missing piece of the puzzle," he adds.



He hit on the idea while brainstorming ideas in his school library for a personal "passion project" involving birds. He came across an article about the decline of the Brown-capped Rosy-Finch. "I knew immediately that I was going to help save the little rosy-brown bird," he says. In subsequent research, he discovered the bird is "one of the least-studied species in North America, mainly due to their limited geographic range and tendency to live in extremely high elevations." He quotes Bird Conservancy of the Rockies that the bird's numbers "have declined by as much as 95 percent over the past 50 years and, unfortunately, we don't know why." He intends to help answer that question, with the help of other Colorado birders.

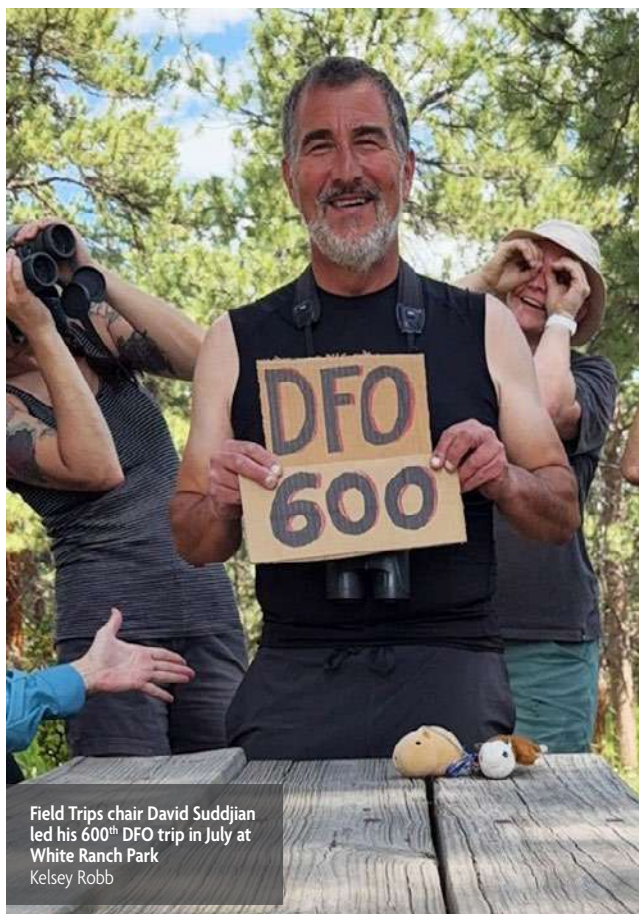
Brandberg has been a birder for one-third of his young life. "During COVID, for my 10th birthday, I got a bird feeder," he says. "I found some bird seed, hung the feeder up, and before the chickadees had even found the feeder," a flock of tanagers swooped in. "The Western Tanager was the flame . . . that lit my passion for birding." And now the Brown-capped Rosy-Finch is sustaining the fire.

Visit Brandberg's project website for more information. If you have questions, you can contact him at colorado.birdresearch@gmail.com.

Continued on page 8

DFO FIELD TRIPS CHAIR LEADS 600TH TRIP (AND COUNTING)

David Suddjian, chair of DFO's Field Trips Committee, reached an astonishing milestone this summer by leading his 600th DFO trip. On July 26, Suddjian and **Anne Craig** co-led six other birders on an [outing to White Ranch Park West](#) in Jefferson County. "It was a lovely summer trek, with lots of wildflowers, great vistas, sweet-scented forest air, and fun birds," David wrote later on DFO's Facebook Group page, listing bird highlights from Lazuli Bunting and Red Crossbill to Common Nighthawk and Western Tanager. He had reached the 500-trip mark just a year and three weeks earlier, on Independence Day 2024. "I'm not sure I'll make to #700, but I hope I can," he added. "#601 is tomorrow." As of this writing, he's already passed 620 trips led. Since the first DFO trip Suddjian led was in October 2016, he has averaged nearly 70 outings a year. By comparison, no other leader in DFO's "modern era" (field trips since 2014 when the club began keeping records online) has approached even 100 total trips led. Congrats to David Suddjian, Ironman of DFO field trip leaders!



Field Trips chair David Suddjian led his 600th DFO trip in July at White Ranch Park
Kelsey Robb



BIRD CONSERVANCY'S FALL FUNDRAISER OCT. 17

Silent and live auctions of art, birding and research trips in exotic locations abroad, and numerous other objects and experiences head the menu for this year's "A Night for the Birds," the annual fundraising for Bird Conservancy of the Rockies. The event on Friday, Oct. 17 begins at 6 p.m. at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, where bird lovers, philanthropists and friends of the Conservancy gather to share their passion for birds and the wild places they call home. Subtitled "A Beacon of Hope" this year, there will be delicious food and drinks, fun and games with great prizes, and inspiring stories from special guest speakers in behalf of the Conservancy and its innovative and effective bird conservation work. For ticket information, visit Conservancy's [Night of the Birds](#).



October 13 DFO 90th birthday meeting

NOTE: DFO's in-person October program, **90 Years of Birding, 10 years Ahead: DFO in the eBird Story** (with DFO alumnus **Chris Wood**), fell too close to our deadline to cover or fully promote in this issue.

If you read this before or by **Monday, October 13**, you can still attend, at 6:30 p.m. at the Lowry Conference Center, 1061 Akron Way, Denver 80230.

Click RSVP box for details of the free event. If you cannot attend, DFO expects to post a video of the program within a couple of weeks in the DFO's website's Past Programs archive and on DFO's YouTube channel.

[CLICK HERE TO RSVP](#)



Chris Wood, director of eBird

Caught in the SNOWstorm: Collaborative Research on Snowy Owls

Scott Weidensaul, author,
SNOWstorm co-founder
Monday, November 24, 2025
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

The winter of 2013-14 saw the largest irruption of Snowy Owls into the eastern US in perhaps a century. It also marked an unprecedented opportunity to learn more about these mysterious hunters of the Arctic. Out of that event came Project SNOWstorm, a collaborative research effort focused on the huge but underknown raptor of the North.

Author, researcher and SNOWstorm co-founder **Scott Weidensaul** ("WHY-den-sau") will share the project's story in "Caught in the SNOWstorm," a Zoom webinar on **Monday, Nov. 24 at 7 p.m.** SNOWstorm's collaborative focus on snowy owls came together, quickly, funded by contributors from around the globe. It is now the most comprehensive study of Snowy Owls in the world.

Scientists, bird banders and wildlife veterinarians have volunteered their time and efforts. Using satellite transmitters, they have tracked more than 110 Snowy Owls from Alaska and the Dakotas to the Great Lakes, Northeast US and beyond. The project also consults with airports and airfields to prevent airplane-owl strikes.

Weidensaul presented another DFO program via Zoom three years ago, in March 2022, on global bird migration after the publication of his *New York Times* bestselling book, *A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds*. He has written nearly 30 other books on natural history, including the Pulitzer Prize finalist *Living on the Wind*. A fellow of the American Ornithological Society, he is a contributing editor for *Audubon* magazine. Based in New Hampshire, Weidensaul is an active field researcher.



Birding former British Honduras? You'd Better BELIZE it

Eduardo Ruano and Ruben Arevalo,

Belizean bird guides

Monday, January 26, 2026

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



Formerly British Honduras until gaining independence from Great Britain in 1981, Belize is known to travelers as an English-speaking vacation mecca (also Spanish and Creole) of beaches, snorkeling and diving, rainforest adventuring and ancient Mayan ruins on the Caribbean side of Central America.

It is also dream habitat for birds. Although Belize is Central America's second-smallest country (roughly the size of Massachusetts), half of its land is covered with rainforests. More than a third of the land is under environmental protection, and it is the region's least-populated country. No wonder it is home to more than 600 species of birds, from multiple kinds of trogons, motmots and puffbirds to the Yellow-headed Parrot and the Jabiru stork, tallest bird in the Western Hemisphere. The species also include large numbers of North American warblers and flycatchers that overwinter in Belize.



Meet the birds of Belize and more through the eyes and photographs of Belizean bird guides **Eduardo Ruano** and **Ruben Arevalo** in DFO's first evening program of 2026. "**Birding former British Honduras? You'd better BELIZE It!**" is set for **Monday, January 26 at 7 p.m. MST via Zoom.**

Ruano and Arevalo are longtime guides at Lamanai Outpost Lodge, one of several well-known destinations on the Belize birding tour circuit. Their home base has checklisted more than 400 bird species, and the lodge is a four-time

winner of the H. Lee Jones Belize Bird-a-thon, an annual 24-hour competition named for the ornithologist-author of the *Birds of Belize* guidebook. It is also headquarters of a long-term University of Florida study of Morelet's crocodile.

Presentation topics range from the land and tree birds of Belize's inland rainforests and pine savannas to shorebirds and waders of the Caribbean coastal region, where the Belize Barrier Reef of corals, mollusks and fish is part of the 700-mile Great Mayan Reef, second longest in the world. Nighttime boat safaris may reveal Yucatan nightjars and poorwills, and tropical forest walks cross paths with Great Curassows, Ocellated Turkeys, Red-lored Parrot and Collared Aracari, a kind of toucan.



Ted Floyd

The Wonders & Glories of Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, the Greatest Place on Earth

Ted Floyd, Colorado birder-writer-educator,
editor of *Birding Magazine*

Monday, February 23, 2026

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

We haven't been keeping score, but by *The Lark Bunting's* very unofficial count, Colorado birding writer-editor, educator and free thinker **Ted Floyd** has been a DFO program speaker approximately twelvety-six-birdzillion times, give or take a few. Denver Field Ornithologists keeps bringing Ted back because he *always* has fresh and provocative things to say about birds and humans, and the collective birding pastime-obsession-addiction that brings the two communities together.

If you're a regular reader of the [CoBirds email birding list-serv](#), you've also seen Floyd's occasional postings about epic birding daytrips (and nocturnal bird listening), full of granular details not only about birds but also other flora and fauna (humans included) along the way. And whenever Ted's subject is a visit to [Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge](#) — usually with a band of smart, eager young birders — it's best to drop whatever you're doing and read along.

So mark your calendar now for **Monday, Feb. 23, 2026** and Floyd's next DFO evening presentation, "**The Wonders & Glories of Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, the Greatest Place on Earth.**" Whatever Ted decides to show and tell about that improbably rich haven for birds, bison and other critters on the edge of urban Denver, his Zoom webinar at 7 p.m. MST will be worth every minute.

As the Lafayette-based co-editor of the American Birding Association's *Birding Magazine*, Floyd needs little introduction, but in quick snapshots, he is:

- A frequent speaker at bird symposiums and festivals and a promoter-educator for young and developing birders
- Author of more than 200 bird articles and five bird books (with three more on the way) and contributor to ornithological and conservation research
- An eBirder who has filed at least one checklist a day for more than 18-1/2 years
- A photographer whose glorious bird images on [his Instagram feed](#) carry Insta-tutorials on each species

Meeting, greeting, and field tripping in a new century: ‘Bird club’ renews and refreshes its decades-old ways

Editor's note: This year, Denver Field Ornithologists celebrates 90 years as a birding club. To mark this milestone, The Lark Bunting quarterly is publishing DFO @ 90, a new history of our club in four segments. Parts 1, 2 and 3 appeared in the [January](#), [April](#) and [July](#) issues (click links to read). Part 4 follows.

Sharon Tinianow and Patrick O'Driscoll

In the first decade of the new millennium, many members of Denver Field Ornithologists still referred to their decades-old organization in a charmingly quaint way. Former DFO president **Tamie Bulow** (2005-07) still remembers how her birding friend and mentor **Patty Echelmeyer** (president 1968-70) put it when talking about the next monthly get-together: “I’m going to bird club tonight.”

Back when “Zoom” only meant “go fast” or “telescopic camera lens,” DFO’s monthly program meetings were much-anticipated social occasions, not the physically remote, online linkups of today. Like now, there was a feature presentation by a knowledgeable speaker. But those evening gatherings were also occasions for companionship and catching up with friends old and new — face-to-face monthly check-ins in less-wired times.

“Everybody felt comfortable being there and seeing your old friends,” Bulow recalled in a recent interview. Every meeting was still held at the Denver Museum of Natural History, where DFO had met ever since its founding in 1935 as the Colorado Bird Club. Each of the monthly sessions was preceded by a 30-minute social half-hour to meet and greet, mingle, and explore the “free table” of bird-related books in back. After the evening program concluded, people tended to linger in amiable knots for more social time and casual follow-up Q&A with the speaker and each other.

On the move

Even though the museum underwent major renovations starting in 2001, the work did not disrupt the monthly gatherings. DFO president **Toni Rautus** (2003-05) arranged to move the meetings to the Denver Zoo. When DFO returned to the museum (now the Denver Museum of Nature & Science), the regular meeting place was the Ricketson Auditorium. (Another major renovation in 2019 would force DFO to leave DMNS for good.)

Continued on page 13

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO’s September and October programs

DFO archives videos of our monthly fall, winter and spring programs. If you could not attend DFO’s first evening programs after the summer break, click the “WATCH ONLINE” link below the September title to view that program recording on DFO’s YouTube channel. The DFO website’s “Past Programs” page also contains These and numerous other DFO Programs from recent years

Monday, September 29, 2025

Trogons, Hummers, Roadrunners: Birding SE Arizona with DFO’s “Sky Islands”

Guru **Joey Kellner**
Birder, herpetologist

[WATCH ONLINE](#)





DMNS ornithology chief Garth Spellman leads vireo + nuthatch ID seminar with DFO trip leaders in 2017
Chuck Hundertmark



DFO past presidents Mary Cay Burger (2007-09) and Tami Bulow (2005-07)



Birding during COVID-19 meant mandatory masks on this DFO conservation committee outing in late 2020
Susan Blansett



Joe Roller, right, DFO president 2015-17, with Tom Behnfield at the DFO picnic
Will Burt

DFO @ 90 *cont from page 12*

Twenty-five years ago, the September 2000 membership meeting topic was “Birding in Australia,” presented by none other than **Bill Turner**, DFO’s current Programs manager and, back then, an organizer of birding tours abroad. Travel was a recurring theme that millennium year. Another trip organizer, former DFO president **Norm Erthal** (1991-93), presented twice in 2000 with “Birding in Attu” at one meeting and “Oilbirds and Mixtecs: Birding in Trinidad & Tobago and Oaxaca” at another. DFO birding ambassador and future president **Joe Roller** (2015-17) had kicked off the year with “Penguins and Ice – a trip to the Antarctic Peninsula.” Later in 2000, **Steve Jones**’s program topic was “Nebraska Sandhills: Sea of Grass.”

Such show-and-tell programs with knowledgeable narration and pictures of exotic birds and locales were popular for both avid globetrotters and armchair birders alike. But travelogues by regulars (Erthal, **Bob Richter**, **John Drummond** and others) and prominent guest speakers weren’t the only fare on DFO’s monthly menu. Presentations also included conservation, wildlife and scientific research topics. Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (now Bird Conservancy of the Rockies) supplied interesting speakers nearly every year. So did government agencies (US Fish & Wildlife Service, Colorado Wildlife and more), area universities and non-government organizations, including Colorado chapters of National Audubon.

When Colorado birding raconteur **Ted Floyd** — the Lafayette-based editor of American Birding Association’s *Birding Magazine* — presented “Advanced Warbler Identification” at the May 2004 meeting, 103 people attended. That turnout is still a DFO record for an in-person meeting. (A couple of marquee Zoom webinar presentations during the COVID-19 pandemic drew two to three times as many digital attendees.) Floyd, a frequent featured DFO speaker through the years, is scheduled once again this coming winter (February 2026, via Zoom).

Unparalleled field trips

The field trips program, always a point of pride in the club’s long history, was unparalleled in 2000 and remains so today. In the first decade of the 2000s, a birder visiting Denver on any given weekend could join in a field trip with DFO. With at least one trip each Saturday and Sunday to mostly in-state destinations nearby and farther afield, about 100 trips a year were the norm. (Today the annual count is more than twice that.) Club historian **Warren Finch** (president 1982-83) reported that in 2001 those trips were led by 57 volunteer leaders, to 64 different locations in Colorado and three in Wyoming. They observed 280 species over the course of 1,048 field-trip hours, driving 7,800 miles and walking 350 miles.

Continued on page 14

Getting it all together back then depended on simplicity and volunteer dedication. There was no field trip committee like now — nor was there online registration for participants. A team of four schedulers, each responsible for three different calendar months, phoned trip leaders month by month to recruit them for outings. Echelmeyer, the former president, performed this vital scheduling function for 30 years (1981-2011), joined over the years by volunteer stalwarts like **Jackie King**, **Lynn Willcockson** (president 1963-66), **Diane Johnson**, **Alison Hilf**, **Meredith Anderson** and **Jill Boice** (now chair of DFO's Grants Committee). By the end of the 21st century's first decade, the scheduling job had become too much for four people. Additional volunteers stepped in to help.

Additional opportunities to enjoy birds, birding and varied writings about them were promoted in *The Lark Bunting* newsletter, which as a monthly publication continued to include field trip summaries and compilations of bird sightings. Newsletter editor **Veronica Holt**, a native of Scotland, even connected DFO with her hometown birding group, the [Angus & Dundee Bird Club](#), in 2003. She and A&DBC's president, **Bob McCurly**, set up a "twinning agreement" that linked the two organizations in field trip information sharing. There were even exchange-style visits, including a 10-member Angus & Dundee delegation's trip to Denver for two weeks in summer 2004 (with field trips and a party). Individual DFO members were warmly greeted on birding visits to the Angus & Dundee region of east Scotland's North Sea coast.

The DFO-hosted Rare Bird Alert continued to be operated by a trio of volunteers. The club participated in local circles of National Audubon's Christmas Bird Count and conducted DFO's own spring and fall counts every year. In short, DFO was humming along with interesting meetings, prolific field trips, a monthly newsletter and many other activities.

Continued on page 15



Nature's Educators showed off birds of prey to a Hawk Watch fundraiser in October 2022
Patrick O'Driscoll



Mark Amershek, usually the picture taker, caught on camera during a 2018 DFO field trip
Diane Roberts



Trip leader David Suddjian is joined by a fellow grizzled creature on Park County field trip in October 2023
Anne Craig

Redoubled efforts

The smooth operation very nearly did not last. **Norm Lewis** (president 1996-99) sounded an unexpected alarm in the April 2001 issue of *The Lark Bunting*. In an article headlined “Could this be the end?,” Lewis pleaded for more volunteers to perform vital work of the club: lining up monthly speakers, putting out the newsletter, and organizing field trips. “It really seems a shame that a group with as long and productive a history as the DFO should have to close its doors,” he wrote bluntly. “Everyone wants to enjoy the benefits of membership, but few want to make the personal sacrifices to keep the operation running.”

The appeal had the desired effect. The next newsletter in May 2001 reported that eight members had volunteered to help. Holt became the new compiling editor of *The Lark Bunting*, and the others took on various tasks of gathering information and writing articles. The newsletter underwent a visual transformation that year, too. Under Holt’s editorship, new features were adopted: “So Sayeth the Speaker” (a review of the previous month’s evening program), “Birding 101” (advice on bird identification), and “Demeter’s Torch” (enlightening musings on birds and birding by **Mike Forster**), as well as reprints of interesting articles from other publications. When the DFO website was updated in 2003, the newsletter was posted online for the first time in the club’s history. Shortly after that, the compilations of bird sightings were moved to the website, too. (The printed-on-paper version of the newsletter became optional until declining interest led DFO to end it after December 2022.)

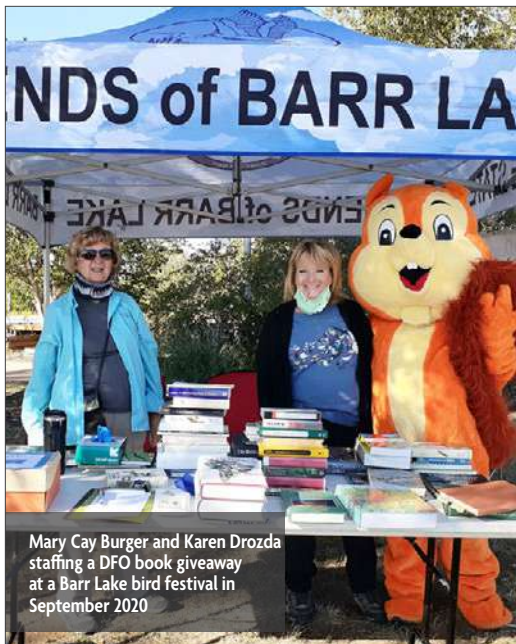
In 2010, another alarm sounded. The January newsletter informed donors that although DFO was a registered nonprofit corporation with the State of Colorado, the club’s standing with the IRS had not been clarified in 17 years. In effect, DFO had somehow fallen out of 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, so donations to the club were no longer tax deductible. Thanks to the work of **Bob Shade**, DFO treasurer at the time, the club’s tax status was eventually re-clarified and contributions were tax-free once more.

"Dynamic" changes loom

That was just the start of what former president **Chuck Hundertmark** (2011-15 and 2017-19) now diplomatically calls “a dynamic period” for DFO. Immediately after he took office in July 2011, a new crisis loomed. On a field trip to the Pine/Bailey area that June, participants returned to their usual parking spot — used in the past without incident — to find they’d all been towed. The meetup spot turned out to be private property, and they had to pay \$307 apiece to get their cars back.

The incident prompted Hundertmark to look more closely at field trip procedures, including its one-sentence liability waiver. He discovered many

Continued on page 16



Mary Cay Burger and Karen Drozda staffing a DFO book giveaway at a Barr Lake bird festival in September 2020



Gregg Goodrich conducting one of his DFO field workshops for using eBird's mobile app
Chuck Hundertmark



The COVID-19 pandemic led DFO to conduct board meetings and programs on Zoom



Familiar faces in SW New Mexico on epic 2019 DFO trip by the late John Breitsch, third from left
Alison Kondler

trip leaders considered it legally worthless and had stopped asking participants to sign it. Other club guidelines for trip leaders were just as brief and only suggestions. Soon, the DFO Board surveyed the membership about field trip leadership. The responses told a blunt story: Although several trip leaders got excellent reviews, others weren't meeting basic safety standards and didn't always accommodate and serve participants with less birding ability.

Meanwhile, a new crisis rose over mishandled finances. In 1994, a generous donor had endowed a fund to support DFO grants for bird-related educational purposes. At some point before 2011, a previous DFO Board reinvested the DFO Educational Endowment Fund's \$25,000 and \$6,000 in club reserves with Bridge Premium, a Denver finance company that promised higher interest than the very low rates banks offered at the time. But in August 2012, DFO learned the Securities and Exchange Commission had charged Bridge and its owners with operating a Ponzi scheme. The Bridge group was eventually found guilty and ordered to repay investors. Despite trying for several years to recover the club's investment, DFO lost most of it.

Under Hundertmark, the board moved quickly to protect DFO's finances. A fact-finding committee led by board member **Bill Wuerthele** (not on the board when the funds were invested in Bridge Premium) dug into what happened. Meanwhile, club treasurer **Mary Geder** chaired a new Stewardship Committee that drafted policies to prevent being defrauded ever again.

The times were ripe for both soul-searching and brainstorming. In October 2012, the DFO Board held a retreat. The results were revamped communications, a stronger field trip program, board restructuring and adoption of a strategic plan. After the retreat, Wuerthele's committee interviewed board members, and at the board's November meeting, it passed measures to improve transparency, recordkeeping and board operations.



A DFO Better Birding workshop with bird photo ID quiz on a classroom screen
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 17

About DFO @ 90



This four-part history of Denver Field Ornithologists marks 2025's 90th birthday of the club. The

project team includes lead writer **Sharon Tinianow** (DFO president), *The Lark Bunting* editor **Patrick O'Driscoll**, and club historian **Kris Haglund**, with assistance from numerous members and supporters.

Research sources include interviews with veteran members of DFO, Denver Public Library archives, and the DFO archives at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, where the club met from its founding in 1935 through 2018. Special thanks to the DMNS Archives Department, led by **Laura Uglean-Jackson**.

DFO @ 90 cont from page 16

Righting the DFO ship

Throughout the transition from crisis to change in Hundertmark's "dynamic period," a new column by the president in *The Lark Bunting* kept members current. Originally labeled "How the Sausage Is Made," it evolved into today's "From the President." Thanks to Hundertmark's leadership and dedicated efforts of the board, Denver Field Ornithologists was righting itself.

By the time DFO marked its 80th birthday in 2015, the waves of change were still rolling in. A new investment policy included guidelines for handling finances, and a new (and now thriving) Research, Education & Conservation Fund rose from the ashes of the Ponzi-plundered Educational Endowment Fund. DFO formed its first Field Trips Committee, with longtime trip leader **Karen von Saltza** as director. She had led a team that drew up guidelines for field trip leaders, bringing the club into a more orderly process of creating, leading and signing up for outings. In 2014, field trip registration went online for the first time at the DFO website.

Kay Niyo, secretary of the DFO Board, became the newsletter editor and **Debbie Marshall** was hired to do the layout. **Ira Sanders** connected the club with a lawyer who drafted a more comprehensive liability waiver for field trips. **Ann Johnson** was hired to redesign the dfobirds.org website, adding the functions we enjoy today, especially easy-click online registration for field trips and one-time signing of the field trip waiver online.

Continued on page 18



Familiar faces in SW New Mexico on epic 2019 DFO trip by the late John Breitsch, third from left
Alison Kondler

Succeeding Hundertmark as president in 2015, retired physician and leading Colorado birder **Joe Roller** was an affable, good-humored and invigorating influence who carried on DFO's recovery. He was also the club's most effective recruiter ever, buttonholing and charming numerous members into volunteer roles and tasks. When the longtime compiler of the Colorado Rare Bird Alert retired in 2018, Roller enlisted and led a circle of volunteers to keep the daily report going another year and a half. It folded only when an unexpected cancer diagnosis sidelined Roller six months before his untimely death on Thanksgiving Eve of 2020.

With field trip rules in place, birding skills enrichment followed as current leaders were certified and new leaders trained. Trip leaders flocked to workshops both indoors and out. They sharpened their knowledge in well-attended seminars, from a Fort Collins birds-and-bugs ramble with noted birder-insect expert **David Leatherman** to a Denver Museum of Nature & Science session with ornithology chief **Garth Spellman** and the museum's collected study skins of White-breasted Nuthatches and Warbling Vireos. Field Trips Committee member **Greg Goodrich** also guided trip leaders and participants alike in adopting eBird's new mobile app to record bird sightings and checklists from the field, an invaluable practice in wide use today.

Continued on page 19



Karen von Saltza, director of DFO field trips from 2010s to 2021
Patrick O'Driscoll



Insect expert David Leatherman explaining cottonwood galls at bird workshop in Fort Collins' Grandview Cemetery ca. 2019
Chuck Hundertmark



When Pueblo birding guru Brandon Percival found a Snowy Owl at Pueblo Reservoir in January 2018, Gregg Goodrich organized a DFO field trip south to see the rarity. The successful trip included, from left, Piming Kuo, Betty Glass, Prat Rudra, Catherine Olin, Screemala Das Majumder, Goodrich and Percival, Alison Kondler, Bruce Neumann, and seated in front, Edith Israel, Ann Troth, and Mark Winfrey
Mark Amershek

Field trips program booms

By the time von Saltza retired from field trip administration in 2021, the field trip program was robust. Under the leadership of her successor, California transplant and expert birder **David Suddjian**, the program ramped up further still: record numbers of trips annually, growing ranks of active leaders, guest-leader and co-sponsored outings with Audubon chapters, and half a dozen new enhanced trip categories, from “Developing Birder” and “Patch Birding” outings to “Birds Plus” blends of birding with side topics like local history, trees, insects, geology and many more.

Suddjian, who as of this writing has led more than 600 field trips himself, organized a DFO “Big Year” in 2018. That year-long pursuit smashed the previous best DFO year with 361 species recorded (35 of them new “lifers” for the club) on a then-record 230 club trips in 2018. (That record fell again in 2024 when DFO led 250 outings, an average of two every three days.) Suddjian also led multi-day birding excursions in 2024 to plant the DFO flag in all the remaining Colorado counties, mostly on the Western Slope, where the club had never led a field trip. On the side, he created “BIRB BOMBS,” a monthly series of season-oriented Zoom mini-webinars on Colorado bird ID. After three years, it grew to more than 35 episodes, all archived today on the [DFO website](#) and DFO’s [YouTube channel](#).



Archer Silverman, not quite 12 in 2022 ...
Patrick O'Driscoll



... and Jan Justice-Waddington, 96 in 2022,
98 today, DFO member since 1950s and
president in 1981-82
Patrick O'Driscoll

In the past 10 years, DFO membership swelled from 433 past 600. The club also assumed management of [Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch](#) and its spring migration raptor count — a complex, 10-week daily operation with professional counters supported by a cadre of volunteers. *The Lark Bunting*, meanwhile, has evolved into a well-respected online magazine that converted to a quarterly journal in DFO’s 90th anniversary year. The club’s nearly decade-old Facebook Group is thriving with more than 6,100 members, and it and our Instagram account and YouTube page reach well beyond DFO’s club membership.

Solving the COVID conundrum

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in late winter of 2020, in-person meetings, programs and all field trips were canceled indefinitely. To regain its bearings after the initial disruption, DFO sought to keep birders in touch online and encourage individual members to practice safely masked pandemic birding. That gradually led DFO to embrace a communications technology used mainly by business, government and higher education: Live online meetings and webinars via Zoom and other platforms.

Within a few months, DFO was attracting prominent guest speakers who could present safely from afar (and without considerable club expense for travel) to members’ computers, tablets and phones: star birder-author **Kenn Kaufmann**, Australian bird guide

Continued on page 20

Luke Paterson, and notable author-experts **J. Drew Lanham**, **Scott Weidensaul** and **Richard Crossley**, among others. With Zoom, DFO weathered the pandemic shutdown and returned relatively quickly to its schedule of eight evening programs a year. But in the years since the shutdown, Zoom webinars came at a social cost: Loss of community camaraderie built when programs were in person and members mingled before and after. Some members, tired of the distance and isolation of programs via video webinar, have advocated for a return to face-to-face, non-digital gatherings.

In DFO's 90th summer and fall, the club has returned twice, on a trial basis, to in-person get-togethers at the Lowry Conference Center in east Denver. One of them, for a 90th birthday celebration in October, would feature DFO's most famous alumnus, eBird co-founder and director **Chris Wood**, who joined the club in the late 1980s as a bird-obsessed seventh grader. If the two meetings register enough member interest, the DFO Board will explore options for live-streaming in-person sessions for those who cannot attend in person. Unfortunately, changes at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science make returning there for meetings impossible, so finding a regular and affordable location equipped for webinars would be another challenge to solve.

Quo vadis, DFO?

As we conclude this "DFO @ 90" history of Denver Field Ornithologists in four parts, an obvious question begs an answer: How will DFO navigate the future? The answer is entirely up to members of the club, but perhaps it may involve renewed outreach to the many people who took up birding in the isolation and downtime of the COVID-19 lockdown and travel restrictions.

It seems ironic now that being pandemic homebodies with time on their hands led many to discover or rediscover nature (and birds) in their yards and neighborhoods. Pandemic birding was a "safe" activity outdoors, masked or not. New enthusiasts include younger adults who are getting involved, whether on DFO's Facebook Group page or on the club's many free field trips. Every day, when members return from the field to file eBird checklists of what birds and conditions they found, researchers benefit from this basic but invaluable citizen science data. That daily merger of science and recreation echoes DFO's unchanged mission since 1935:

To promote the study and preservation of birds and their habitats

We invite you to get more involved in determining DFO's future as our club looks ahead to its centennial in just 10 more years. Visit the [volunteer page](#) of the DFO website.



For 90 years, DFO field trips have included vistas like this 2025 sunset at Lower Latham Reservoir in Weld County
David Suddjian

DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, a member since 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of *The Lark Bunting*. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of *The Lark Bunting* since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he joined DFO in 2014 and became a field trip leader in 2016. He is also secretary of the DFO Board

“Birdie” Hurlbutt, rescuer of Denver’s sick and wounded wild birds, was a DFO original

Patrick O’Driscoll and Sharon Tinianow

In the popular history of 20th-century Denver, a few nicknames have stuck in the public consciousness. We’ll always have “**Unsinkable**” **Molly Brown** — and “**the Donkeys**,” that love-hate-love handle that diehard football fans pinned on the hometown Broncos. The city’s Black community enshrined “**Daddy Bruce**” **Randolph** for his barbecue and philanthropy. “Governor Gloom” still recalls the famously flinty views of three-term Gov. **Dick Lamm**.



But over the last three decades or so of the 20th century, if you ever asked what to do about a sick or wounded bird, the reply was usually quick and to the point: “Call **Birdie**” — aka “**The Bird Lady**” or “**Bird Woman**.”

Born in 1913, her given name was **Catherine Alice Hurlbutt** — the middle child of three in a cattle ranching family that moved to Jefferson County from Wyoming when she was age 6. Fascinated by birds growing up, she raised her first feathered friend, a chicken named **Penny Precious**, on the family’s Shaffers Crossing homestead. She often spoke of climbing a tree as a child to “rescue” a Great Horned Owl in no need of saving.

In adulthood (presumably when she acquired her nickname), Birdie Hurlbutt became a real and celebrated savior, devoting herself for decades to the rescue and rehab of thousands of wild birds — first as an avocation (her day job for 41 years was as a stenographer for the US Bureau of Reclamation, where she kept a birdfeeder by the office) and later full time in a long and busy retirement. Overshadowed by all of that was Birdie’s longtime involvement in the local birding community from its earliest days — which were, in fact, DFO’s earliest days.

Although she never married, Hurlbutt was no shy and retiring spinster. She converted her modest 3-bedroom home in south Denver into a licensed refuge for birds to recuperate back to the wild or remain in the foster care of her resident menagerie. Birdie even made house calls, responding to every avian SOS at the wheel of her white 1975 Checker, bespectacled and beaming with a toothy smile. The words “Bird Taxi” were hand-lettered on one side, and “Bird Ambulance” on the other. (License plate: “C BIRDS.”) Local and national newspapers and broadcasters spread the story of Birdie nationwide.

“CATHERINE HURLBUTT’S FOR THE BIRDS,” Denver’s *Rocky Mountain News* headlined in 1982. “BIRD LADY OF DENVER CARES FOR URBAN FOWL,” the paper profiled 18 years later. “BIRD WOMAN,” “BIRD REFUGE,” and “BIRD LOVER,” *The Denver Post* crowed. “THE BIRD LADY OF DENVER,” *National Public Radio* chimed in.

Continued on page 22

Far less known were Birdie's deep roots in the Colorado birding world. As a charter member of Denver's Colorado Bird Club in 1935, she helped build the organization that would become Denver Field Ornithologists 29 years after its founding. In an interview 60 years later, Hurlbutt described what so attracted her to feathered creatures.

Hers was a different urge than just to see and hear. Ever since childhood, Birdie liked being able to hold a bird in her hands. "Birds just appeal to me just by being birds," Hurlbutt, then 82, declared in a 1995 profile in *The Post*. "It's not their flying or singing; I just want to hold them. I just love their little faces."

So it made sense that the young adult Hurlbutt would join that newly formed bird club in Denver, in the depths of the Great Depression. Within a few years, she took on substantial volunteer roles. In 1944, Birdie became Colorado Bird Club librarian, caring for a collection of books and magazines that members could borrow. By 1947, she was corresponding secretary, a post she held through 1959.

In March 1960, she joined the editorial board of *Colorado Bird Notes*, the club's first newsletter. Over the years she wrote many articles for it, including a detailed 90th birthday tribute in 1955 to **Horace G. "Dad" Smith**, known then as the oldest ornithologist in the state.

Throughout her years with the Colorado Bird Club and then DFO, Birdie was a tireless advocate for bird conservation. She used her writing skills to urge elected officials to pass laws protecting birds. At a monthly meeting of the club in 1950, she noted her written advocacy for the protection of Bald Eagles and urged her audience to write letters, too. In the early 1960s, she wrote her congressman seeking support for The Wilderness Act (which passed in 1964) and urged others to do the same. In a January 1967 DFO presentation, she advocated for habitat preservation. For her many such efforts, she was awarded a life membership in DFO in 1972. She continued to be active in the club through the 1980s and into the new millennium.

Hurlbutt was also a prolific writer of bird-related letters to the editors of Denver's two dailies on topics from keeping house cats indoors to curb wild bird predation to opposing Denver's use of corn tainted with hallucinogens to sicken and drive away pigeons from downtown.

Birdie's most visible legacy was her hands-on work to save and rehabilitate injured birds. Her fascination with them had led her to keep pet parakeets, but she made home companions of other birds, too. She was particularly intrigued by how some birds can learn to "talk," parroting back human words. Not that they actually conversed with humans; she assumed they were just entertaining themselves. In March 1969, she advertised in *Colorado Bird Notes* for a fledgling crow for voice training purposes. Eventually she would write a book about this bird sidelight, *Adventures With Talking Birds*.



Birdie Hurlbutt with one of her parrots



Undated photo from her obituary of Birdie with a pheasant at her home refuge for injured birds

Continued on page 23

Hurlbutt's first foster bird, in the 1970s, was a pet duck named Daisy that had come between a wife and husband. Word got around, and people with other injured or unwanted birds were soon at her doorstep. They included members of DFO and Audubon, Denver animal control, the US Post Office, and veterinarians. Before long, her entire house was a clinic. Severely injured birds recuperated in cages. As the wild ones became ready for release, she moved their cages to the backyard to reacquaint them with the outdoors.

All this time, Birdie had acquired a permanent posse of bird home companions. Daisy the duck would perch atop Hurlbutt's head. **Mortimer**, a long-lived starling rescued from a cat, spent six months learning to say his name in Birdie's bird speak efforts. Her longest-lived companion was the best known: **Edgar**, a moody raven rescued as a hatchling and kept in a large cage in one of the bedrooms.

Naturally, she taught him to croak the most famous word in **Edgar Allan Poe's** poem *The Raven*: "Nevermore." She let Edgar out inside the house sometimes, but he could be destructive. He hated Birdie's favorite coffee mug, which was shaped like a toucan. After he snatched the mug by its handle and cast it to the floor, Birdie waved the broken cup at him. In reply, Edgar barked like a dog. "You're bad," she scolded. "Never," Edgar replied. She eventually taught him to say, "You're a baaad boy, Edgar." Her bad boy lived past his 26th birthday.

After retiring in 1977 from the Bureau of Reclamation at age 64, Hurlbutt dedicated most of the next four decades to bird rehabilitation. She formed the Bird Rescue Association, a group of friends who helped her pick up and care for injured birds. Other organizations like the Birds of Prey Rehabilitation Foundation focused on raptors and more charismatic species. Birdie devoted hers to the common city birds no one else cared for. Typical clients were sparrows stuck with bubblegum, a woodpecker with a fish hook through its bill, birds hurt by barbed wire. But the worst injuries came from cats. "People let them run loose and they just tear birds to pieces," she lamented.

At any time, Birdie's avian guests numbered in the dozens. In its obituary after her death at age 99, *The Denver Post* reported that at one point, she had "a robin, a raven, a starling, a goose, a duck, a bobwhite, two golden pheasants, two ring-necked doves, four crows, five house finches, nine sparrows and 27 pigeons dispersed among cages in the house and yard."

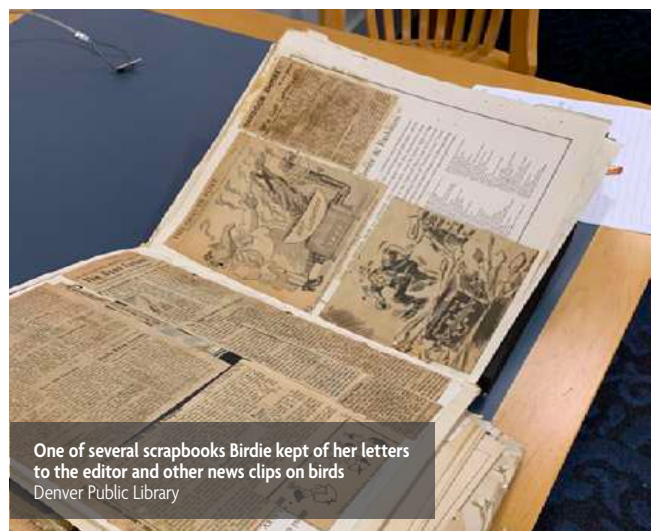
By 1990 her collection of recuperating birds had grown to 200. She became a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. "My special gift is birds, so I take care of them," she told the *Rocky Mountain News* that year. "I don't believe any civilized person should leave an injured bird flopping around." Birdie averaged 20 rescue calls a day, some of them from police departments in four surrounding counties.

She also shared her love of birds with children, visiting schools with some of her rescued birds. Her thick scrapbook (which resides now in the Denver Public Library archives) included letters from children thanking her for her classroom visits. In 1985, she received a "9Who Care" award from Denver's KUSA-TV for her work with birds. She wrote and self-published several other books including *Birds in My Life* and *Edgar And Me*.

In short, Birdie Hurlbutt was a self-described eccentric, devoted activist and curmudgeonly humanitarian who believed the world would be infinitely better if we were a lot nicer to birds. "We're all given something we're supposed to do," she told one interviewer, adding that she would keep at it "as long as I can put one foot in front of the other."

In 2010 Birdie moved into dementia care and passed the baton to other rehabilitators. She died three days before Christmas 2012 at age 99, still deeply interested in birds to the end. She was buried in Crown Hill Cemetery in Wheat Ridge. In Hurlbutt's obituary, caregiver and friend **Cindy Eide** recalled one of Birdie's sayings that would have made a fitting inscription on her tombstone:

"The only thing better than one bird is two birds."



One of several scrapbooks Birdie kept of her letters to the editor and other news clips on birds
Denver Public Library



FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

Here's to those who lead us: the first DFO Field Trip Leader Achievement Awards

David Suddjian

Excellent field trips are the core activity of Denver Field Ornithologists. They have been since our club's founding in 1935 as the Colorado Bird Club.

Simply put: Field trips are what DFO does first and best — and we cannot do it without certified leaders who plan, coordinate and guide them. These leaders regularly perform this selfless service so that anyone can enjoy the birds and birding camaraderie of DFO outings.

Throughout our club's history, scores of members have served as volunteer leaders, and a good number of them have repeated their contribution by leading many field trips for years, sometimes seasonally or even monthly. To recognize those who have regularly led multiple outings, the DFO field trip program announces, in the club's 90th anniversary year, the first DFO Field Trip Leader Achievement Awards, a tiered set of honors for leader service.

These trip leader achievement honors include seven levels of accomplishment that reflect thresholds of cumulative trips led during each leader's involvement in the field trip program. The levels are labeled with different "totem birds" that are also iconic Colorado species (see right).

We use the year 2014 as a starting point for data on trips led because it is the year DFO began online recordkeeping of field trips. We hope one day to provide a reckoning of trips led by leaders going as far back as older, undigitized records can take us.

We begin by first saluting 22 trip leaders who have "retired" from leading DFO trips since 2014. Meanwhile, current field trip leaders who have attained any of the seven levels for achievement awards will be recognized in the January 2026 issue of *The Lark Bunting*. In addition, look for the achievements of all leaders to be acknowledged on the DFO website soon.

Continued on page 25



Brown-capped Rosy-Finch

100+ trips



Sandhill Crane

75+ trips



Black Swift

50+ trips



Mountain Plover

40+ trips



Burrowing Owl

30+ trips



Mountain Bluebird

20+ trips



Lark Bunting

10+ trips

2025 Field Trip Leader Achievement Awards

Now-"retired" leaders (since 2014)



Sandhill Crane
75+ trips



Mark Amershek (92)



Black Swift
50+ trips



Diane Roberts (70)



Karen Drozda (63)



Karen von Saltza (61)



Gregg Goodrich (56)



Mountain Plover
40+ trips



John Breitsch (44)



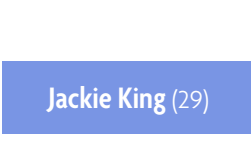
Burrowing Owl
30+ trips



Mary Cay Burger (34)



Mountain Bluebird
20+ trips



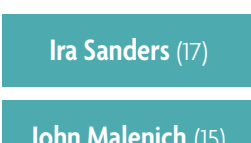
Jackie King (29)



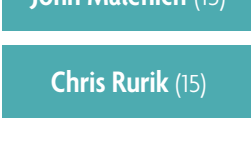
Bill Wuerthele (21)



Lark Bunting
10+ trips



Ira Sanders (17)



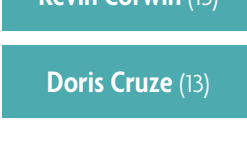
John Malenich (15)



Chris Rurik (15)



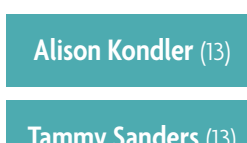
Sue Summers (14)



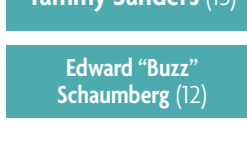
Kevin Corwin (13)



Doris Cruze (13)



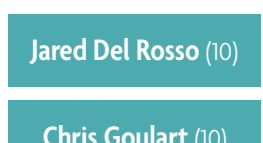
Alison Kondler (13)



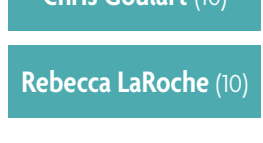
Tammy Sanders (13)



Edward "Buzz" Schaumberg (12)



Wendy Wibbens (12)

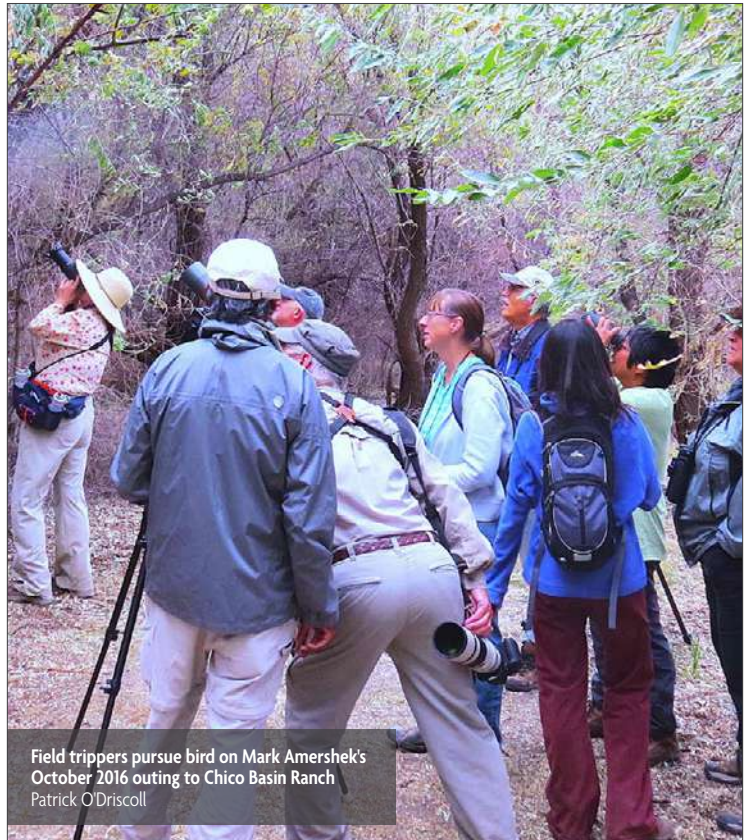


Jared Del Rosso (10)



Chris Goulart (10)

Rebecca LaRoche (10)



Field trippers pursue bird on Mark Amershek's
October 2016 outing to Chico Basin Ranch
Patrick O'Driscoll

Autumn yard prep? Doing NOTHING can boost your biodiversity . . . and birds, too

Jared Del Rosso

Here's a radical thought: This fall, commit to doing nothing . . . for your local biodiversity. As the migration season winds down, you can support backyard biodiversity by doing anything BUT what you usually do this time of year. Leave the yard alone and instead devote your time to anything else.

Still chasing rare warblers? Go birding even more! Is the new-season glut of TV premieres and live sports calling you? Binge! Are you not yet nauseated by the artificial autumnal aroma of pumpkin spice? Go get another latte!

Do anything but garden. Just don't. Don't rake your leaves. Don't pick up sticks and branches. Leave those spent wildflower blooms and stalks alone. The truth is, most other species, birds included, prefer disorderly messes to meticulously managed landscapes.

There is a host of reasons why, but they all boil down to a simple truth: Disorder is complex, and neatness is not. Complexity provides and nurtures a diversity of micro-habitats, food sources, and shelter in that untended winter garden. Simplicity's neatness denies most of that for every other species except us humans.

With this in mind, here are five things you don't have to do in your yard this fall, and why.

DON'T RAKE

Leave your leaves alone! Perhaps you've heard [this advice](#) before. It's true. Leaves feed the soil by feeding organisms that promote decay: fungi, worms, beetles, [springtails](#), and other microscopic beings. A rich layer of fallen leaves provides sheltering habitat for overwintering insects, especially moths and queen bumblebees. And they provide you, the birder, with this: a crunchy floor beneath your shrubs and trees where you'll see and hear sparrows, especially [Spotted Towhees](#), scratching for vital morsels through the winter.

Continued on page 27



Bushtit gathering spiderwebs to build nest
Dave Prentice



White-throated Sparrow and House Finch
in winter in an unraked Denver yard
Patrick O'Driscoll



Anna's Hummingbird nest woven with spiderwebs
© Richard Lee on Unsplash

I realize this no-rake advice may not work for everyone or in every part of your yard. I vacuum autumn leaves off my hardscaped front yard every year. It's a compromise that keeps my xeric garden tidy, the neighbors happy, and the cacti and yucca I grow there protected from rotting under the dampness of downed leaves.

But I keep and use those leaves. They offer high-carbon "browns" for composting to complement the nitrogen-rich "greens" of kitchen scraps. If allowed to break down into leaf mold, they also create some of the richest organic matter you'll find. While most Colorado native plants don't want or need leaf mold mixed into their soil, you can use leaf mulch in vegetable gardens or bedding of garden plants from richer habitats.

DON'T THROW OUT BRANCHES AND TWIGS

Let's face it: Our neighborhood trees aren't supposed to be here. Most are badly adapted to the difficult climate of the Front Range. Late snows in spring and early snows in autumn bring down branches. Strong winds in any season litter our yards with sticks, branches and twigs. They can even split tree trunks.

We probably have no choice but to remove large branches and downed trees. But we can still gather many smaller sticks and branches into brush piles. Although a small brush pile can't match the ecological benefit of a large, naturally formed pile in the forest, it does attract spiders, bumblebees and garter snakes to an urban or suburban yard. Like leaves, brush piles are overwinter shelter for all kinds of insects (and safe cover for small birds, too). They can also do double duty as lattices for native vines such as Thicket Creeper (*Parthenocissus inserta*) or Old-Man's Beard (*Clematis ligusticifolia*).

If your yard has room for small stick piles, your birding benefit can show up in July, when young house wrens fledge. Northern House Wren adults are voracious hunters of soft-bodied insects and spiders, and they're especially skilled at disappearing into landscape nooks including brush piles. Fledglings like them, too. While wandering around my modest suburban yard in the summer of 2024, I encountered an entire family of young wrens perched inside a stick pile, waiting safely for their parents to return with food.

DON'T BAG GRASS CLIPPINGS

Impressive but often non-native grasses are common décor in yards around Denver. Massive "[hardy pampas grass](#)" is among the most conspicuous, forming massive clumps with flowering stalks reaching up to 10 feet tall. In fact, it is a Mediterranean species and not from the Pampas of South America. I admit to a certain admiration for this grass, which on the Denver landscape is outdone by only large shrubs and trees. But the grass has a propensity to reseed itself, and removing a full grown clump may require a front end loader! To avoid this and to prevent other non-native grasses from going wild, I recommend removing the seed heads before wind and birds disperse them. But those of popular native grasses (switchgrass, little bluestem, blue grama) can and should be left for the birds.

The dried leaves of grasses become important micro-habitats for overwintering insects, including queen bumblebees. They're also popular nesting material for birds, from American Robins and House Finches to Spotted Towhees and Mourning Doves, among others. One of my favorite spring sights is of robins gathering grasses from my yard to weave into the nests they'll build there and next door.

DON'T REMOVE SPENT FLOWERS AND STEMS

The easiest way to garden is to let annuals and perennials reseed where there's space for them. Leaving their stalks in place allows that to happen. Many songbirds, of course, also feed on the seeds of our wildflowers. Wildflower stalks also benefit insects. Not all insects shelter in galls like psyllids do. Some overwinter in wildflower stems, including solitary mason bees and leafcutter bees. Still other insects, particularly weevils and seed beetles, develop inside the seeds.

Although we often think birds visit wildflower stalks to eat the seeds, sometimes they're feeding on those hidden insects. Last year, the Eastern Redbud tree in my yard avoided a late spring frost and was covered in seeds, which themselves were packed with redbud seed weevils. When the adult weevils began to emerge from the dry pods in October, Black-capped Chickadees visited daily to peck up most of them. Downy Woodpeckers are also skilled hunters of hidden insects, from [Goldenrod galls](#) to [Honey Locust Seed Beetles](#).

Continued on page 28

Birds even gather seeds for nesting material. Several years ago, I observed a pair of Bushtits collecting the feathery seeds from a neighbor's Clematis vine. Then last spring, I was surprised and somewhat confounded by a female Broad-tailed Hummingbird paying unusual interest to a Rubber Rabbitbrush, which doesn't flower until mid-to-late September. Was she foraging tiny insects? Collecting spider silk for her nest? Or might she have been after the plant's soft seeds for her nest, too? Whatever it was, I couldn't tell, but I was glad for whatever the plant provided her.

DON'T CLEAN COBWEBS

Are local children likely to think yours is the neighborhood's haunted house? Definitely! Nothing signals autumn like old spiderwebs, accruing dust and insect carcasses in window edges and around the yard. Leaving those webs alone now will prove valuable to the birds in winter and spring.

Cobwebs are virtual grocery stores for some birds. During winter, I sometimes find Say's Phoebes hunting around shopping center and office windows. I'm not entirely clear whether live insects are drawn to the warmth of the buildings, or if the birds are finding insect bodies in abandoned spiderwebs. Other birds also feed in webs, though the ornithological community hasn't given this much attention. In 1976, one bulletin article reported observations of [Cedar Waxwings hunting in webs](#). The following year, an article in the *Wilson Bulletin* reported on apparent feeding from spiderwebs by species in [five families of birds](#) — hummingbirds, wrens, vireos, finches and warblers. Keep a watchful eye on your yard's cobwebs, record any avian observations in eBird, and perhaps our citizen-science will yield some new discoveries!

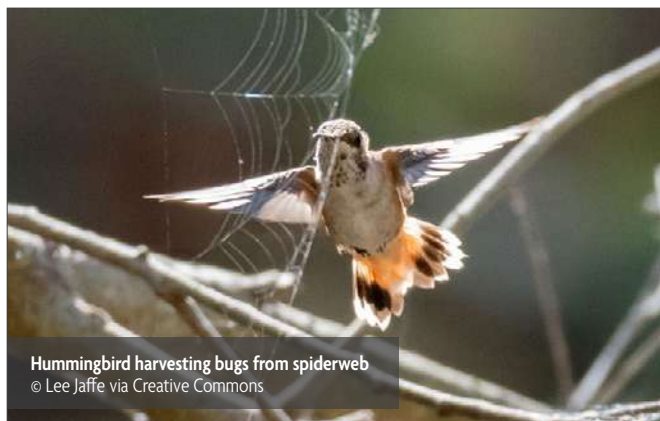
Webs are also important nesting resources. In early spring, House Finches inspect cobwebs around my back patio. I'm not sure if they're collecting the silk for nests, but many small birds do. Hummingbirds, including Broad-tailed, rely especially on spiderwebs to structure and anchor their nests. Even the big, dangling, gourd-shaped nests of tiny Bushtits are built largely with spider silk.

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

Is all this really as simple as doing nothing, for the benefit of biodiversity? Almost — though there's still the work of managing invasive plants and establishing (and re-establishing) native ones. There's also the matter of neighbors skeptical about the "mess" of your biodiverse yard, though some might be placated by a prominently placed sign announcing yours is Xerces Society "[Pollinator Habitat](#)" or that you are an Audubon "[Habitat Hero](#)."

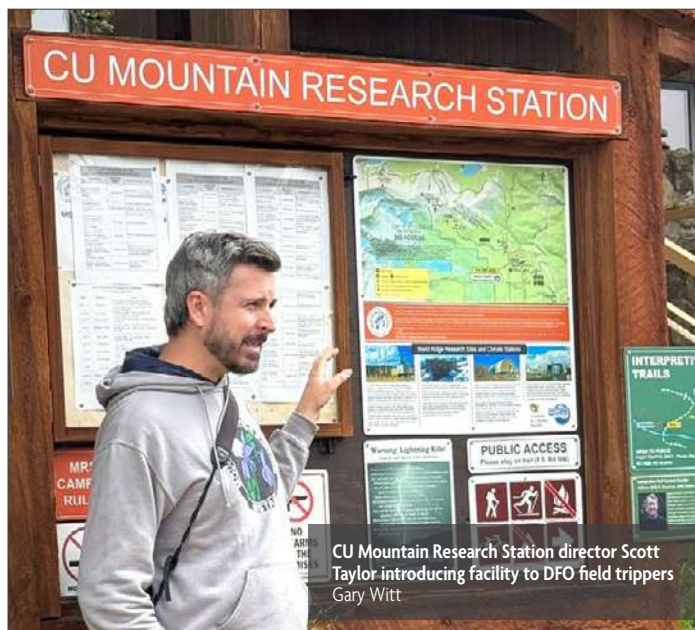
And then there's this paradox: The more nothing you do this fall, the more you'll get to watch all winter, spring, and summer. After all, who's going to eBird all the visits by winter sparrows, keep a distant but watchful eye on the spring nests of robins and finches, and listen to the summer-long hum of bees and Broad-tails?

The Lives of Birds is a recurring feature by DFO member **Jared Del Rosso**, a birder, wildflower gardener and sociologist with a special interest in urban and suburban nature. He's also writing a book about Whip-poor-wills in American culture. Read more at his blog *The Lonesome Whip-poor-will*.



Grants in action: Chickadee-focused field trip to CU's Mountain Research Station

“What a fascinating experience to see what our young people are doing in their respective avian research” — Gary Witt, field trip leader



Jill Boice

For just the second time since Denver Field Ornithologists offered grant awardees this show-and-tell option, three University of Colorado Boulder biology students hosted a DFO visit this summer to report on their field research where they did the work.

On July 12, DFO trip leader **Gary Witt** and 15 other field trippers visited [CU's Mountain Research Station](#) north of Nederland and 26 miles west of the Boulder campus. Station director **Scott Taylor**, whose students use the facility as an open-air laboratory for numerous research projects, welcomed us with a briefing about the station and its activities. Then three of his students who received DFO grants for 2025 gave presentations on their bird-related work. Afterwards, we strolled together around the station grounds to observe the local birdlife.

DFO organized this field trip to showcase the efforts of researchers who received grants from the club's [Research, Education & Conservation Fund](#). The awardees are asked to report back to us about their grant-winning projects by presenting at a DFO monthly program meeting, writing about it for *The Lark Bunting*, or leading an outing like this one.

The research station occupies an attractive location along a mountain stream inside the 190-acre Columbine Springs Reserve, a CU property for more than a century. The Mountain Climate Program, established there in 1952, has collected long-term climate data from the montane, subalpine, and alpine zones of Colorado's Front Range. At times, as many as 90 research projects have been underway at the station simultaneously. This high-elevation research campus also hosts a variety of classes and other events, including a [series of public seminars](#) on Wednesday evenings in summer.

Continued on page 30



The Taylor Lab, part of CU's Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, studies evolution, hybridization and genetics broadly, but it is especially well-known for its work on chickadees (which includes all three of these grant winners). Lab researchers also investigate how hybrid zones can be used to monitor species' responses to climate change. The lab has placed 406 nest boxes along a gradual incline in elevation from Boulder city limits to the research station. In the past six years, student researchers have banded and blood-sampled more than 1,000 chickadees and sequenced the genomes of more than 400.

This genetics-based work indicates that hybridization between Black-capped Chickadees and Mountain Chickadees is so common that every bird whose genomic data has been sampled has at least a tiny fraction of the other species' DNA. Sampling also has shown a strong link between human disturbance of chickadee habitat and where the two species cross-breed. Hybrid zones are important windows on chickadee evolution. The results of many generations of cross-breeding reveal insights into the genetics of local adaptation, barriers to reproduction, and speciation, the process of a species splitting into two or more species.

Here's what the CU researchers presented for the DFO visitors:

Chickadee incubation behavior

Undergraduate student **Nate Carley** is examining differences in the birds' egg incubation behavior, species identity, ambient temperature during incubation, and the ability of their nests to maintain stable temperature. He showed us nests he has collected from standard square-bottomed chickadee nest boxes. He found plastic containers that fit the nest dimensions exactly to hold them for further study. Some of the nests still held unhatched eggs — so tiny! Nate has also observed differences between the species in nest structures and materials, and the parasites in them. He is now reviewing and evaluating this year's data.

Spatial analysis of avian poxvirus

Also an undergraduate student, **Samantha Kruczek** is using Black-capped and Mountain chickadees from mist nets and hundreds of nest boxes to collect genetic and skin samples. In applying for her grant, she noted that "emerging infectious diseases are a growing concern in wildlife populations with significant implications for biodiversity, ecosystem stability and species conservation." She recently discovered that what was initially thought to be poxvirus was actually infestation by scaly leg mites living in the leg skin of chickadees.

Continued on page 31



Grant recipient Sara Padula in lab with feeder array for her CU Boulder chickadee research
Gary Witt

Grants needed now more than ever

This year, Denver Field Ornithologists was able to fund nine interesting projects, including the three CU research studies discussed here.

Unfortunately, CU's Taylor Lab (home for these projects), as well as student research and scientific studies of all kinds in Colorado and elsewhere, are not likely to receive federal research money for the next funding cycle in the current political climate.

That sad reality means grants from DFO's Research, Education & Conservation Fund are more important than ever. Please consider an end-of-year gift to the fund today. Thank you!

DONATE NOW!



Student chickadee researchers Nate Carley and Samantha Kruczek with inventoried nests
Gary Witt



Western Flycatcher seen on DFO field trip to CU Mountain Research Station above Boulder
Issac Ho

GRANTS IN ACTION *cont from page 30*

Genetic adaptation for remembering where food is cached

Fourth-year doctoral candidate **Sara Padula** is investigating genetic adaptations for spatial memory in chickadees at contrasting elevations. In harsh winter conditions, the birds must create cognitive maps of their food-cache locations to survive. She showed us an innovative “smart” feeder array that tests and records birds’ success at learning. Each food dispenser is equipped for radiofrequency identification. After chickadees in the study are caught and tagged with “Passive Integrated Transponders,” each feeder tracks when a bird lands on it. This triggers it to release a seed for that bird to eat or cache. To familiarize the chickadees with the process — land on a feeder, get a seed — all the feeders open to all birds with tags at first. As the experiment progresses, each feeder is programmed only to open for specific individuals, forcing each bird to remember which feeder rewards it with a seed. (Visits to non-rewarding feeders are tracked, too.) Padula is incorporating data gained from this array into genetic analysis.

After the presentations, we all went for a bird walk, taking extra care because a moose and her calf had passed through the area that morning. (We got to see the tracks they left behind.) A Western Flycatcher posed nicely and Pine Grosbeaks were above the parking lot. Taylor and his students also showed us a very young chickadee with its aluminum research tag. We also caught a glimpse of a raptor flying overhead. When Taylor said he believed it was a goshawk, that led to a spirited group discussion about identification of American Goshawks and other birds of prey.

Jill Boice joined DFO in 2001, chairs the club’s Grants Committee, and leads occasional slow field trips. She is also a volunteer raptor monitor at Cherry Creek State Park

Hawk Watch 2025 in review: Record raptor tally, new \$7,300 grant bolster program

Natalie Uschner-Arroyo

The [Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch](#) community in Denver Field Ornithologists has much to celebrate in 2025, from record-breaking numbers of migrating birds of prey to a major grant award from metro Denver's [Scientific and Cultural Facilities District \(SCFD\)](#). These milestones reflect the Hawk Watch program's dedication to bird conservation, scientific study, and community engagement.

In late summer, the DFO Hawk Watch Committee received exciting news that our application for a grant from the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District was a success. SCFD supports organizations in the arts, science and culture in seven Denver area counties with proceeds from a 0.1% sales tax in those counties. The \$7,287 award provides essential funds to sustain Hawk Watch operations, including the payroll for two professional counters who lead the count and guide the volunteers.

This year, Hawk Watch's Spring count of migrating raptors set a record, tallying 3,144 birds of prey moving north along Dinosaur Ridge, a set of prominent foothills that outcrop in Jefferson County west of Denver. This year's count total broke the previous record set in 2002. The 2025 count also logged 495 observer hours, the fourth highest amount since biologists and birders began recording raptor counts in 1990. To read the full report of the Spring 2025 count, go to the [Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch website](#).

This year's success was underpinned by dedicated professionals, headed by Lead Counter and Project Lead **Emma Riley** and Counter **Audrey Anderson**. Weekend observers **Laura Campbell** of Colorado State University and **Laura Farnsworth** of CU Denver, joined as valuable additions to staff. With the added support of high school intern **Haley Caron** of Bear Creek HS and Hawk Watch volunteers, the team maintained full coverage during peak migration periods and ensured consistent collection of raptor data.

Continued on page 33

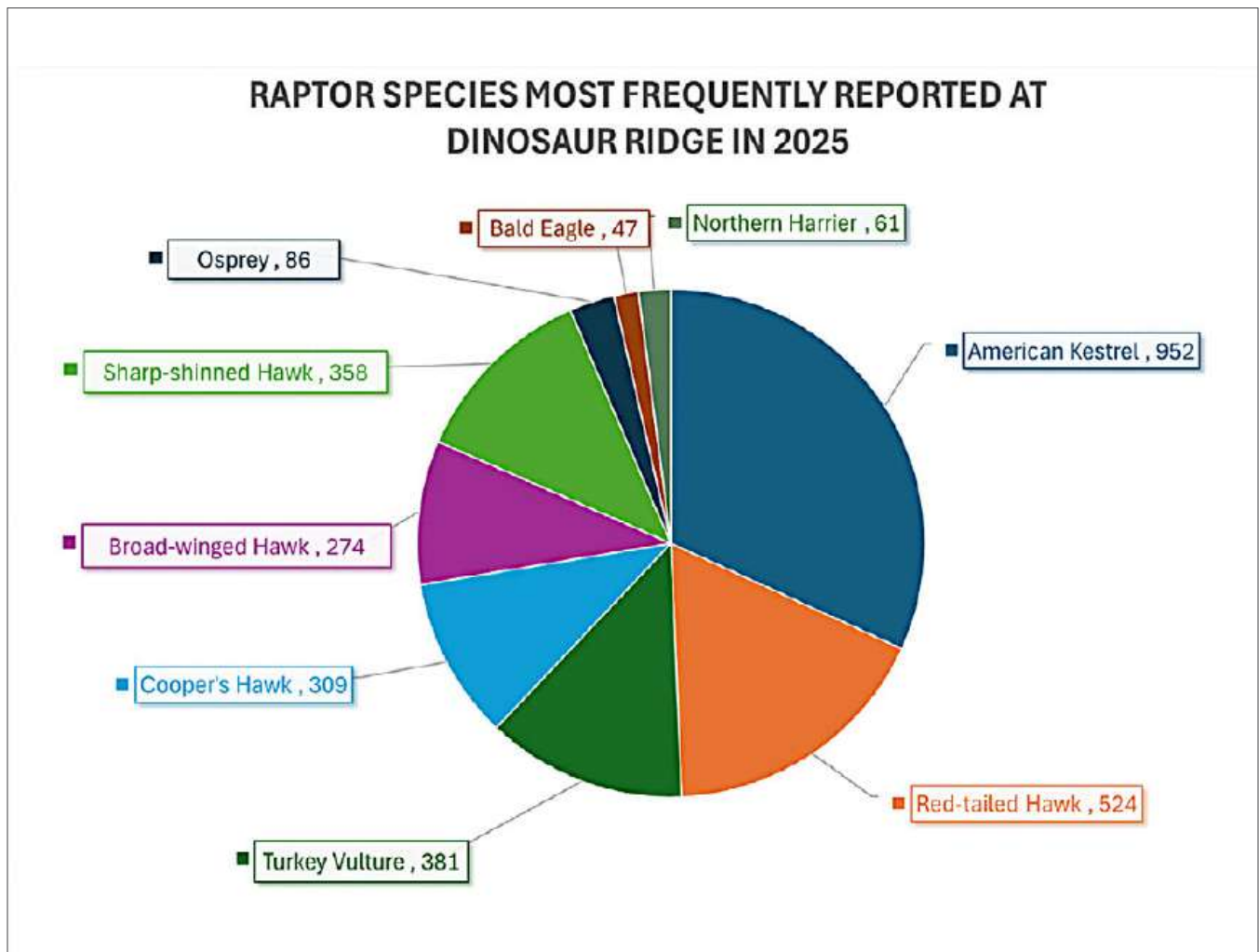


Lead counter Emma Riley, center, with Audrey Anderson, left, and Laura Campbell
Natalie Uschner-Arroyo



DFO hawk watchers scanning for raptors in 2022
Allison Peters





Some species highlights for the 2025 count:

- American Kestrel led the tally with 952 individuals, including 177 in one day
- Broad-winged Hawk sightings broke the Dinosaur Ridge record with 274 birds
- Seventeen species of raptors were recorded, including two sightings of Rough-legged Hawks, an uncommon visitor

Hawk Watch welcomed more than 1,300 visitors to the ridge, including local birders, families, school groups, and travelers. DFO's Hawk Watch Committee led three public field trips on the ridge this season, including two "Hikes for Homeschoolers" (ages 7-12) in partnership with [Denver Audubon](#), and an adult education program with the Denver & Front Range chapter of the [Feminist Bird Club](#).

Beyond the ridge, youth outreach opportunities continued to grow through Hawk Watch's partnership with Nature's Educators, Colorado's largest wildlife education organization. This year's outreach included raptor education programs at Bear Creek, Welchester and Westgate elementary schools in Jefferson County. Hundreds of K-5 students learned about conservation in our region and connected with [Nature's Educators'](#) live raptor ambassadors.

In April, Hawk Watch hosted its third annual [Mile High Raptors' Raptorthon](#), a day of camaraderie and community science that raised \$1,975 for both local raptor monitoring at Dinosaur Ridge and national hawk watch efforts through the [Hawk Migration Association](#). This year's event introduced a new "birding circle" approach to count species within a set radius around the Dinosaur

Continued on page 34

Ridge Hawk Watch site. The result: 64 total species, including 14 kinds of raptors. Highlights included the first Swainson's Hawk of the season, and an Osprey that entertained everyone by perching atop a power pole to eat a fish it caught.

Finally, data from this year's count added to Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch's contributions to the [Raptor Population Index](#), a collaboration among North American birding organizations that produces long-term species trends based on migration count data from 80 sites across the continent. With 11,000 birds of prey counted since 2021, Dinosaur Ridge is the only monitoring site in Colorado contributing data to the network.

With the 2026 season on the horizon, Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch's goals are:

- Hire two professional seasonal counters and two weekend observers
- Expand field trip offerings and volunteer training
- Increase public awareness, research opportunities, and accessibility to the site
- Contribute to Colorado Department of Transportation's (CDOT) new interpretive signage at the trailhead beginning at the Stegosaurus Park-n-Ride lot below Dinosaur Ridge

With gratitude, Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch acknowledges our partners, Aiken Audubon, Colorado Field Ornithologists (CFO), Denver Audubon, Evergreen Audubon, Front Range Birding, Hawk Migration Association, Jefferson County Open Space, Jefferson County Open Space Foundation, Nature's Educators and Wild Birds Unlimited.

We also extend special thanks for their financial support to the Aiken and Denver Audubon chapters, CFO, Jeffco Open Space Foundation, and the Three Birds Foundation, as well as to all our individual donors. Your generosity makes everything we do possible and we are immensely grateful for your belief in our mission.

One more sincere thank you to our staff, organization partners, and the dedicated group of volunteers whose time and energy helped make the 2025 season such a success. This includes the Hawk Watch leadership team — **Chip Dawes, Mariane Erikson, David Hill, Pam Moore, Janet Peters,** and **Natalie Uschner-Arroyo.**



Immediate need to fill Hawk Watch volunteer roles

The 2026 season of DFO's Hawk Watch spring raptor count is still several months away, but three vital volunteer roles need to be filled in advance.

If you have skills in people management, organization and oversight, we've got just the volunteer positions for you! See below, and if you're interested or want to know more, please contact Hawk Watch Committee chair and program manager **Natalie Uschner-Arroyo** at dinoridgehw@gmail.com. Thank you!

Field Staff Manager

This volunteer works closely with the Hawk Watch Committee on professional staff needs. Daily Hawk Watch sessions are led by two skilled professional counters. The manager helps hire and communicate with them in the off-season and oversees their work in-season, including payment of stipends and conducting post-season reviews of counters' performance. The manager also compiles an end-of-season field review and collects program equipment.

Volunteer Coordinator

This volunteer coordinates closely with the committee to address volunteer needs. Off-season, the coordinator organizes names and contact details in the database of previous volunteer observers who help the counters in raptor monitoring. This person also sends periodic email calls for training and other opportunities. In-season, the coordinator arranges daily volunteer coverage (March 1 through May 10) and contacts volunteers if /when weather or other factors delay or cancel a Hawk Watch session.

Volunteer Coordinator Assistant

Assists the Hawk Watch volunteer coordinator and fills in if / when the lead Coordinator is not available.

DFO AdBIRDtisements!

DFO AdBIRDtisements are FREE ads in *The Lark Bunting* to seek, sell or donate birding-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (works of art, photographs, note cards, posters, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include a weblink if items offered online
- *The Lark Bunting* reserves the right to edit for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit). ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each issue. To renew, resubmit by next quarterly deadline
- Ads available only to DFO members

Next deadline: Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2025

To place a DFO AdBIRDtisement, email editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com



Free to good home: New women's birding vest

Basic Options branch khaki multi-pocket outdoors vest for birding, fishing. New and unworn. Women's size Small. If interested, contact **Kathy Holland** at ksholland356@gmail.com.



Black-crowned Night Heron chicks
Patrick O'Driscoll

Welcome to new DFO members

Jill Cooper of Denver; Angela and Jonathan Hebel, Lakewood; David Hennes, Denver; Scott and Peg Roen, Parker; Diane Rouse and Julie Martinez, Aurora; Susan Simpson, Lakewood; Olivia Thornton, Romy Bernstein and Eden Bernstein, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Jill Cooper, Thomas "Tim" and Candice Johnson, Graham Ray

Friends of DFO

Ajit and Liza Antony, Mary Beverly, Jill Cooper, Felice Lyons (in memory of John C. Breitsch), Malcolm "Mac" Parks

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Jill Cooper, Scott Ruschak





FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

July, August, September DFO trips *In Focus*

Field trips in the three summer-into-fall months included 84 total outings. Of those, participants on 31 of them took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 90-year-old club. If you’re on DFO trips in October, November, and December, take a few shots of your fellow birders birding and send us the best for the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, coming out in January 2026. Send .JPG or .PNG photo files of birders in the field, with date/location of trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline for our January 2026 winter-quarter issue is Wednesday, Dec. 31. Thanks!



JULY 2

Deer Creek Canyon Open Space Park (Jefferson County)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Shay Lyons, Claire Elliott, Ryan Corda, Michelle Verostko, Lynn Sauer, Melody Serra, Bruce Raff

DFO birders on Meadowlark Trail during July 2 field trip to Deer Creek Canyon Open Space Park in Jefferson County. Yellow-breasted Chats and Lazuli Buntings led the show

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST



JULY 3

Ken Caryl Ranch Open Space (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Marjorie Middleton, Morgan Kahle, Ryan Corda, Sarah Feigelson, Virginia Gulakowski, Linda Purcell

Birders on trail in Bradford Park during July 3 field trip to Ken Caryl Open Space in Jefferson County

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 37



JULY 9

Birds + Railroad History in South Park (Park)

Leaders

David and Stephen Suddjian

Participants

Susan Suddjian, Melody Serra, Virginia Gulakowski, Linda Purcell, Susan Blansett, Chip Dawes, Isaac Ho, Mary Fran O'Connor, Robert Raker, Sue Summers

Field trippers pose in historic Como, CO, end of the mainline for the 19th-century Denver South Park & Pacific narrow-gauge railroad during a joint DFO-Denver Audubon Birds + History field trip July 9 to various birding spots in scenic South Park. Trip leader David Suddjian's son, Stephen, a fan of the DSP&P, co-led the outing

(Linda Purcell)

TRIP REPORT



JULY 13

Flying J Ranch, Jeffco Open Space (Jefferson)

Leader

Lynn Slaga

Participants

Isaac Ho, Sara Jepsen, Jodi Haller, John Batt, Cindi Inklebarger, Kelsey Robb, Ryan Janson

DFO birders pose for group shot on the trail during July 13 field trip to Flying J Ranch in Jefferson County Open Space

(Lynn Slaga)

CHECKLIST



JULY 14

Matthews-Winters Trail, Morrison (Jefferson)

Leader

Judy McKeon

Participants

Andrea Duran, Liz Cox, Isaac Ho, Joe Chen, Phil Waltz, Howard Leon Smiler

Birders in tall grass on July 14 field trip on Matthews-Winters Park in Jefferson County Open Space near Red Rocks

(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 38



JULY 16

Golden Gate Canyon SP (Jefferson)

Leaders

Ryan Dibala

Participants

Marjorie Middleton, Melody Serra, Joe and Lucia Chen, Caroline Armstrong

Trip leader Ryan Dibala notes birdsong during July 16 field trip to Golden Gate Canyon State Park. The walk included wildflowers and good looks at MacGillivray's Warbler, Clark's Nutcracker, Williamson's Sapsucker, Western tanager, Hermit Thrush, and a Yellow-rumped Warbler feeding its offspring

(Melody Serra)

CHECKLIST



JULY 21

Lair O' the Bear Park (Jefferson)

Leader

Shay Lyons

Participants

David Suddjian, Virginia Gulakowski, Aubrey Garnett, Marjorie Middleton, John Batt, Linda Purcell

Birders along Bear Creek during July 21 field trip to Lair O' the Bear Park in the JeffCo foothills

(Shay Lyons)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 39



JULY 23

Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Linda Purcell, John Whitaker, Cynthia Breidenbach, Sharon and Lance Tanaka, Linda Cunico, Marjorie Middleton

Spectacular sunrise sky greets participants in joint DFO-Denver Audubon field trip July 23 to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT



JULY 26

White Ranch Park West (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian and Anne Craig

Participants

Joseph Chen, Linda Purcell, Cynthia Breidenbach, Michelle Trotter, Kelsey Robb, Ryan Corda

All eyes are on a Lazuli Bunting during July 26 field trip to White Ranch Park in Jefferson County, the 600th DFO trip led by David Suddjian. The 5-mile trek featured lots of wildflowers and vistas, and fun birds: Common Nighthawk, Red Crossbill, Western Tanager, Plumbeous Vireo, Western Bluebird, piles of all three nuthatches and more

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 40



JULY 27

Summer Hummers, Bow Mar (Jefferson)

Leaders

Courtney Rella and Tina Jones

Participants

Sarah Feigelson, Phil Waltz, Kathy Cisar, John Batt, Andrea Duran, Joe Chen, Sharon Tanaka

Longtime DFO member Tina Jones, center with cane, hosts July 27 field trip through her gardens in Littleton. An expert in bird-friendly native plants, Jones has filled her yard with wildflowers and plants that attract hummingbirds and other pollinators

(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST



JULY 27

Birds + Trees ID, Route 103 / Mt Blue Sky Byway (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Mary Ramsey, Andrew Wertheimer, Lynn Slaga, Bruce Raff, Scott Hammel, Kathy Holland, Liza and Ajit Antony, Mark Winfrey, Archie Millard

Birders on DFO/Denver Audubon Birds + Trees field trip July 27 focus on five kinds of conifers at one of multiple stops along Colorado 103 from Bergen Park to Mount Blue Sky Road. Participants learned to ID nine conifer species at different elevations from 7,700 feet to 11,000 feet

(Scott Hammel)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 41



JULY 30

Summer Hummers and others, Pine Junction / Bailey (Jefferson, Park)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Anne Craig, Virginia Gulakowski, Isaac Ho, Jason Zolle, Diane Roberts

Birders on a residential balcony-deck during a short July 30 field trip to hummingbird feeders at homes near the Jefferson County mountain communities of Pine Junction and Bailey. Besides Calliope, Rufous and Broad-tailed hummingbirds, they saw Band-tailed Pigeon and other higher-country species

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT

See checklists on DFO "Past Trips" page



AUGUST 3

Staunton State Park (Jefferson)

Leader

Timothy Condon

Participants

Bruce Raff, Michelle Verostko, John Batt, Susanna Donato, Chip Dawes, Lynn Slaga, Jeanne Ladewig

Field trippers enjoy the view during Aug. 3 outing to Staunton State Park. Dusky Grouse were no-shows, but birders saw lots of others, including Brown Creepers and numerous Mountain Chickadees

(Timothy Condon)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 42



AUGUST 3

Summer Hummers, Ken Caryl Valley yard (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Brady Anderson, Christine MacDonald, Jenny Germano, Jonathan Hebel, Michelle Puplava, Joy S

DFO paparazzi watching hummingbirds on Aug. 3 visit to Field Trips chair David Suddjian's Ken Caryl Valley yard

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST



AUGUST 4

Tucker Gulch (Jefferson)

Leader

Ryan Corda

Participants

Angela, Jonathan and Juliana Hebel, Kara Cooper, Caroline Armstrong, Isla Pohl

Zeroing in on a Cooper's Hawk during DFO evening field trip Aug. 4 to Tucker Gulch in Golden. Highlight: the sibling chatter of three Cooper's fledglings. A constant chorus of Broad-tailed Hummingbirds and Spotted Towhees surrounded the birders, who also got good looks at Western Flycatchers and Lazuli Buntings

(Ryan Corda)

CHECKLIST



AUGUST 10

Louviers and DuPont Open Space (Douglas)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Lynn Slaga, Scott Hammel, Natasha and Noelle Albert, Dale Pate, Christine Macdonald, Cindi Inklebarger

Birders on DFO field trip to Louviers in Douglas County on Aug. 10 scan for birds on site of defunct DuPont dynamite factory. The group checklisted 49 species in town and adjacent Dupont Open Space

(Scott Hammel)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 43



AUGUST 21

Alexx & Michael's Pond Stork Chase (Broomfield)

Leader

Ryan Corda

Participants

Andrea Duran, Cynthia Breidenbach,
Erin Ridolfo, Julia Gwinn, Shelly Bleckley,
Virginia Gulakowski

**DFO birders on successful chase trip
Aug. 21 to view the rare Wood Stork at
Alexx & Michaels Pond in Broomfield**

(Cynthia Breidenbach)

CHECKLIST



AUGUST 22

South Platte Park (Arapahoe)

Leader

Cynthia Breidenbach

Participants

Julia Gwinn, Kris Saucke, Jeanne Ladewig, Steve Methven, Sandra Hoyle, Michelle Herrmann,
Lynn Sauer, Catherine Millard, Nadiyah Watts

**Birders on joint DFO-Denver Audubon field trip in South Platte Park prepare to cross
boulder field at Eaglewatch Lake. Spirited field discussions touched on Cooper's and
Sharp-shinned hawk differences, sussing out a female Wood Duck, and sorting a flock
of Blue-winged Teal**

(Julia Gwinn)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 44



AUGUST 24

Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams)

Leader

Jason Bidgood

Participants

John Batt, Joe Chen, Matthew Fast, Joseph Margoshes, Larry Wilson, Debra Lentz, Kris Tita, Mary Fran O'Connor, Debbie Fox

Watching American Coots from the floating boardwalk across the marshy east end of Lake Ladora on DFO field trip Aug. 24 to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR

Jason Bidgood

TRIP REPORT



AUGUST 29

Barr Lake SP banding station (Adams)

Leader

Charlie Chase

Participants

Alexander Dalton, Cynthia Breidenbach, Paula Rosson, Joe Chen, Debra Lentz, Jodi Haller, Cynthia Andreatta, David Andreatta, Joseph Margoshes, Mary Fran O'Connor, Donna Samuels, Brian Haller

Participants in Aug. 29 field trip to Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' banding station at Barr Lake SP

(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST



AUGUST 29

Poorwill Evening at Ken Caryl Ranch (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Chrissy Fitzsimmons, Paula Wegert, Deborah Carstensen, Deanna Beutler, Melissa Akers, Noah Rath

Field trippers on Common Poorwill Evening outing to private open space at Ken Caryl Ranch listen and look for and record calls of poorwills. Between sunset and dusk, they encountered 11 poorwills, two of them in view. For most, it was a life bird

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 45



AUGUST 31

Prewitt Reservoir and points northeast (Logan, Morgan, Washington)

Leaders

Joey Kellner

Participants

Timothy Condon, Christopher Curwen, Bob Spencer, Julia Gwinn, Sondra Bland, David Suddjian, Cynthia Breidenbach, Michelle Trotter, John Batt, Edie Israel, Kris Tita, Joe Chen, Scott Hammel, Diane Roberts, Tim Smart, Robert Raker

Longtime DFO trip leader Joey Kellner, left, with some of the 16 participants on his annual fall daytrip to Prewitt Reservoir SWA and Jackson Lake SP in northeastern Colorado. Highlights of the 97-species outing included Red Knot, Black-bellied Plover, Caspian and Common Tern, Virginia Rail, Townsend's Warbler, Great Crested Flycatcher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Warbling Vireos and Burrowing Owl

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT

TRIP VIDEO *by Scott Hammel*



SEPTEMBER 1

Poorwill Evening at Ken Caryl Ranch (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Joy Sommerer, Peg Roen, Debby Miller, Jeremy Nichols, Mona Reed, Jason Bidgood, Linda Purcell

The poorwills only called for about 25 minutes but after the calling died down, the group spotted many poorwills on the hillside and on the trail. September 1, 2025, Jefferson, County, CO

(Jason B. Bidgood)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 46



SEPTEMBER 5

Confluence Open Space, Aurora (Arapahoe)

Leaders

Cynthia Cestkowski

Participants

Jodi Haller, Catherine and Kevin Millard, Susan Young, JP Young, Lynn Sauer, Cassandra Callaghan

Eight birders joined this DFO trip to Confluence Open Space in Aurora, only accessible August to November because of nesting Bald Eagles. Trip highlights included the two adult resident Baldies, a beaver, a large flock of Blue-winged Teal in flight, migrant Wilson's Warblers and a Cassin's Vireo, a life bird for several

(Cynthia Cestkowski)

CHECKLIST



SEPTEMBER 8

Denver Botanic Gardens @ Chatfield Farms

Leaders

David Suddjian and Judy McKeon

Participants

Sarah Feigelson, Catherine and Kevin Millard, Kara Cooper, Kris Saucke, Melanie Helton, Sarah Steiner, Coreen Spellman, Kris Tita, Melissa Wetzig

Scanning from the road at Chatfield Farms on Sept. 8 field trip. Highlights of a 33-species outing included hummingbirds, Black-crowned Night Heron, multiple hawks, and goldfinches in the sunflowers (and a still-active American Goldfinch nest with at least one baby)

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 47



SEPTEMBER 14

Belmar Historic Park, Lakewood (Jefferson)

Leader

Shay Lyons

Participants

Kris Saucke, Rae West, Linnea Bjorkman, Claire Elliott, Bridget Sanders, Andrea Grasso, Michale Kernan, Marie Mager

Field trippers in tall grass during Sept. 15 outing to Belmar Historic Park in Lakewood

(Shay Lyons)

CHECKLIST

SEPTEMBER 15

Chico Basin Ranch (El Paso, Pueblo)

Leader

Jessica Miller

Participants

Timothy Condon, Bridget Sanders, Sue Summers, Jonathan Whitely, Bonnie Prado, John Batt, Oliver Urdiales, Melody Serra

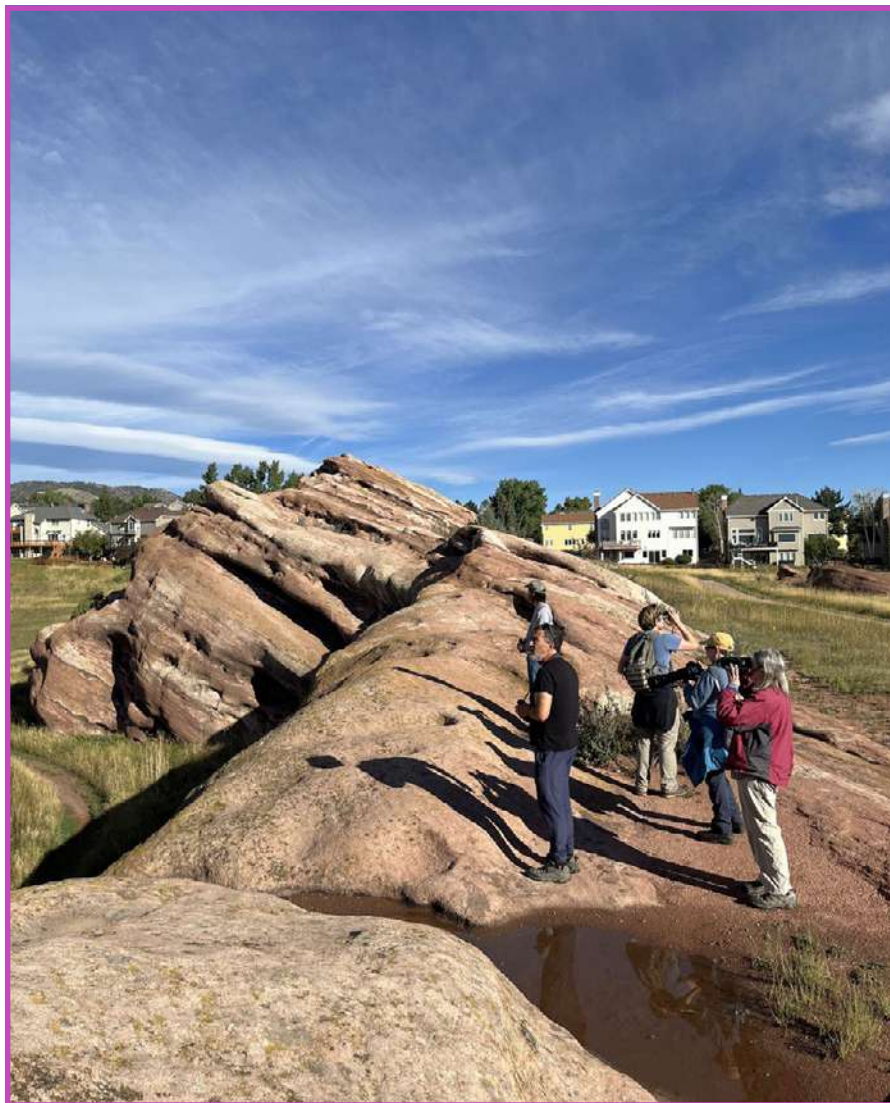
Looking for Ladder-backed Woodpecker in banding station grove during Sept. 15 joint field trip with Aiken Audubon to Chico Basin Ranch. The trip was a first visit to this major El Paso-Pueblo counties destination for two in the group. The day's 57 species featured excellent views of Burrowing Owls, and the plethora of other wildlife included porcupine and coyote

(Melody Serra)

TRIP REPORT



Continued on page 48



SEPTEMBER 19

Ken Caryl Ranch (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Virginia Gulakowski, Anne Craig, Renee MacKenzie, Ryan Corda, James Henson

Participants in Sept. 19 field trip to private open space in Ken Caryl Ranch scan landscape from outcropping. Their route included a narrow gap in a bigger hogback that resembled a southern Utah slot canyon. Highlights: hummingbirds, Wilson's Warblers, Rock Wren, Vesper Sparrow, Red-naped Sapsucker and Western Tanager, turtles, frogs, a praying mantis and a bull elk

(Anne Craig)

TRIP REPORT

SEPTEMBER 19

South Platte Park (Arapahoe)

Leader

Cynthia Breidenbach

Participants

Joseph Margoshes, Kris Saucke, Jodi Haller, Evangeline Gallegos, Nadiyah Watts, Bonnie Prado, Briana Evans

Birders on Sept. 19 field trip to the south end of South Platte Park in Arapahoe County pose on the trail. Two families of Wood Ducks were a big highlight, among other species

(Cindy Breidenbach)



CHECKLIST

Continued on page 49



SEPTEMBER 20

Roxborough State Park (Douglas)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Virginia Gulakowski, Bridget Sanders, Mary Ramsey, Kelsey Robb, Robert George

Joint DFO-Denver Audubon field trippers at Roxborough SP on a Sept. 20 “jay day”: 65 Blue Jays, 33 Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays and 6 Steller's Jays among many other birds (Green-tailed Towhee, Osprey, Northern Harrier, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Turkey Vulture)

CHECKLIST

SEPTEMBER 27

Colorado 103 near Mount Blue Sky (Jefferson, Clear Creek)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Anne Craig, Timothy Condon, Caoimhín Perkins, Lauren Friesen, Jodi Haller, Virginia Gulakowski, Robert George

Birders on DFO/Denver Audubon “Birds Plus+ Trees” field trip Sept. 27 scan from Juniper Pass Picnic Area in Clear Creek County. While birding at a series of stops at different elevations along Colorado Highway 103, the group learned about identification of nine different conifer species (David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT



LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

At CommonGround Golf, birdies are . . . blue? Unexpected couple finds a hole in one nestbox

Northwest side of CommonGround Golf Course,
with wetlands in back and Denver skyline beyond
Joe Jenkin, Jenkin Productions

*EDITOR'S NOTE: CommonGround Birders, an informal birding group at the golf course of the same name, was organized by DFO member **George Ho**. In this article and month-by-month photos, he shares the story of their summer-long encounter with the first family of bluebirds to take up residence there*

George Ho

On April 12, during the monthly get-together of our birding group, nine of us made a surprise discovery at our regular meeting place, [CommonGround Golf Course](#) in Aurora: [Mountain Bluebirds](#) were occupying a nest box along one of the fairways.

When we returned a month later (May 10) and again on May 25, the bluebird pair was still there, in the shade of a pine tree about 40 yards from the 17th green. We concluded that they had established a nest — not an insignificant occurrence on the edge of the Great Plains. Soon after that, we saw them feeding young. Thus began our season of monitoring the first known Mountain Bluebirds at the golf course. From April through August, we documented the pair's successful hatching, rearing and fledging of at least one and maybe two broods of young.

The course owners first placed 13 nest boxes on the property between 2009 and 2010, when work on the golf links had been completed. They attracted swallows, and still do. But after more than a decade, many of the boxes were in disrepair. So CommonGround replaced them in 2023-24. That coincided with the first regular visits by birders to the course and neighboring wetlands between it and Denver's Lowry neighborhood.

In summer of 2023, we created CommonGround Birders, a loose fellowship of birders, golfers and those who are both. With about 60 people on our email list, we host outings once a month, twice monthly during spring and fall migration. This is chiefly to visit the wetlands, which have sparked birder interest in shorebirds migrating through Denver.

We cover the course partly by cart and partly on foot. The golf course people have been enthusiastic, interested and helpful in accommodating us. They even publish a birding map of the course, with suggested viewing points and parking spots for birders' carts.

After we saw the bluebirds, it occurred to us that CommonGround's open spaces, shrubs, trees and ponds were ideal for nesting Mountain Bluebirds — except for the elevation. Although Denver officially sits at 5,280 feet, our reading told us this species prefers higher uplands, between 7,000 and 12,500 feet.

Continued on page 52



Nestbox (in shadow) where Mountain Bluebirds nested in spring-summer 2025 at CommonGround golf course
George Ho



Mountain Bluebird male, perched on golf course flagstick
George Ho



Male and female (below) Mountain Bluebirds in the rough at CommonGround Golf Course
Lisa Pera



Bluebirds have avian company at course, wetlands

Since beginning their monthly birdwatching outings two years ago, CommonGround Birders members have identified more than 120 species on their “home” course.

This birds-and-birdies fellowship has submitted 43 checklists to eBird since the first group visit on July 8, 2023. As of this August, they had checklisted 122 species, from American Avocets to Virginia Rails. Although the tally includes passerines, raptors, gulls and waterfowl, their primary focus is on the seasonal shorebirds that favor the wetlands between the golf course lands on the east and Denver’s Lowry neighborhood on the west.

Besides avocet, shorebirds recorded include Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitcher, Red-necked and Wilson’s Phalarope, Willet, Wilson’s Snipe, and six kinds of sandpipers (Baird’s, Least, Pectoral, Solitary, Spotted and Stilt). Waders and marsh birds checklisted include Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Snowy and Great Egret, White-faced Ibis, Sora and Virginia Rail.

Anyone interested in attending future CommonGround Birders outings, or in receiving emails on future events, other announcements and news about CommonGround Wetlands (formerly Westerly Wetlands) can contact **Joe McCleary** (jmccleary@coloradogolf.org) or **George Ho** (hogeorge@yahoo.com).

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK *cont from page 51*

Typically, the birds return north from wintering grounds in March or April, migrating through Denver enroute to where they get their name: the mountains. I had previously seen Mountain Bluebirds at higher elevations in Golden Gate Canyon SP, in Jefferson and Gilpin counties above Boulder, where they are ubiquitous in summer.

When we asked someone more knowledgeable if our sighting was rare, we revised our thinking. Longtime DFO member **Kevin Corwin**, emeritus chair of the Colorado Bluebird Project, said Mountain Bluebirds are increasingly common in less elevated locations where nestboxes have been placed, especially in Douglas County. The bluebird project monitors and maintains “trails” of boxes around the state.

“I am not surprised that Mountain Bluebirds nested on that golf course,” Kevin said. “They weren’t nesting there when it was actually the (undeveloped) Great Plains, but now we’ve modified the landscape to the point they can find places to live there.”

Corwin thinks our golf course breeding pair may have fledged last year somewhere nearby or along bluebird migration routes to and from winter habitat. “They are the ‘pioneers’ who travel away from their natal territories in their first spring migration north to find suitable nesting and hunting areas,” he explained.

Potentially, they could be back in 2026. “Established adults usually return to the same vicinity year after year,” Kevin told us, “often to the same nest box.”

We’ll be watching!

Nesting photo log continues on page 53

George Ho, a retired physician in internal medicine and rheumatology, joined DFO in 2025. He spends time birding, writing, and jogging. With a third specialty in palliative medicine, he also teaches courses to the lay public on end-of-life issues.



White-faced Ibises fly across CommonGround fairway as golfer prepares to swing
George Ho



◀ APRIL 12, 2025

At a fairway nest box where we previously saw only swallows, our group notices this male/female pair of Mountain Bluebirds occupying the box. On return visits May 10 and May 25, we confirm that these bluebirds are nesting

George Ho

MAY 29 ▶

Days later, we confirm that bluebird young have hatched when we see the parent birds (female left, male right) taking turns feeding hungry nestlings at the “front door” of their nest box

Sam Hying



JUNE 9 ►

We first see fledgling young in a nearby tree where the adult male Mountain Bluebird feeds two of them before flying off for more food. On this visit, we count four fledglings from the bluebird nest

George Ho



◄ JUNE 9

Two of the four Mountain Bluebird fledglings interact on a tree branch as they await another feeding

George Ho



◀ JULY 6

More than a month has passed, time enough for the fledglings to move on. But we find the adult male Mountain Bluebird guarding the same nest box until the return of the female, above. This indicates she is likely incubating a second clutch of eggs inside

George Ho

JULY 17 ▶

Although we do not see them, we confirm that bluebird young have hatched in the nest box. The adult birds make repeated trips out and back for grasshoppers (female, left), grubs (male, right), moths and other food for their young. The adults also exit carrying fecal sacs from the nest

George Ho



JULY 17 ►

Female adult leaves the nest box after delivering food to second-brood young. When we return on July 29 and August 3, we find no sign of her or of any fledged young outside the nest. (The male is on another fairway.) We surmise that the unseen nestlings fledged from the nest box while we were away

George Ho

AUGUST 17 ▼

When we return to clean out the empty nest box, we find this complete skeleton of a nestling. The adult Mountain Bluebirds are perched in a nearby tree, but we have not seen young from their second brood outside the nest. Although the status of other second-brooders from the nest box is unknown, this marks the end of our 2025 summer of bluebird monitoring at CommonGround

George Ho



Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
**HAPPY AUTUMN AND
EARLY WINTER BIRDING!**



Wood Stork, with morsel
Alexx & Michael's Pond,
Broomfield County
Gary Witt